

# **University of Alberta**

## **Reclaiming Islam and Modernity: A Neo-Shariati Revisiting of Ali Shariati's Intellectual Discourse in Post-revolutionary Iran**

by

**Siavash Saffari**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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*To the memories of Haleh Sahabi, Hoda Saber, and other martyrs of Iran's Green Movement.*

## **Abstract**

Over three and a half decades after his death, Ali Shariati (1933-1977) continues to occupy a major place in the ongoing academic and public debates about the relationship between Islam and modernity. Seldom, however, have commentators attended to the ways in which Shariati's intellectual followers in post-revolutionary Iran have read his thought in relation to the condition, content, and negotiation of modernity in Iran and other contemporary Muslim societies. This dissertation seeks to address the existing research gap by examining new readings of Shariati's thought by a group of Iranian intellectuals and activists collectively known as neo-Shariatis. It argues that in post-revolutionary Iran, neo-Shariatis have read Shariati's revolutionary Islamic discourse as a project of indigenous modernity whose critical reexamination can serve the negotiation of a third way between hegemonic universalism (in the form of Enlightenment rationalism, authoritarian modernism, and autocratic secularism) and essentialist particularism (in the form of Islamism and other types of religious, cultural, and ethnic identitarianism). Drawing on the normative and methodological insights of the emerging subdiscipline of comparative political theory, the dissertation identifies the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse as one among several other discourses of indigenous modernity in contemporary Muslim societies, and as part of a broader post-colonial reconfiguration and reclaiming of modernity. In examining the sociopolitical significance of the Shariati/neo-Shariati project, the dissertation focuses on the theorization of an account of progressive public religion and a contextually grounded discourse of egalitarian secular democracy in the contributions of Ehsan Shariati, Sara Shariati, Reza Alijani and other leading neo-

Shariati figures. The dissertation also identifies some of the ways in which the Shariati/neo-Shariati critique of colonial modernity and the attempt to develop a counter-hegemonic discourse of modernity on the basis of an Islamic spiritual ontology finds common ground with the discourses of various Western and non-Western critics of colonial modernity and Enlightenment rationality, and contributes to the advancement of a post-colonial vision of cosmopolitanism.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Why Shariati and neo-Shariatis?**

In his observations about the February 1979 Iranian revolution, Michel Foucault made mention of Ali Shariati (1933-1977), whose invisible presence, he remarked, haunted "all political and religious life" in the country.<sup>1</sup> At the time of the revolution Shariati had already been dead for close to two years. There was (and is), however, little doubt about his significant influence in Iranian society during the 1960s and 1970s and in the formation and maturation of the revolutionary uprising that led to the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty. It was this iconic and unrivaled status that gave Shariati, in Foucault's words, "the position, so privileged in Shi'ism, of the invisible Present, of the ever-present Absent."<sup>2</sup> Thirty-six years after his death and thirty-four years after the Iranian revolution Shariati remains one of the most prominent Iranian thinkers and his ideas continue to inspire and influence new generations of his readers in Iran and beyond. Today, Shariati is recognized as one of the most important Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century and the translations of his books enjoy wide readership across the Muslim world, from Malaysia to Tunisia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?" *Le Nouvel Observateur*, October 16-22, 1978, quoted in Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 207.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Maryam Shabani, Fariba Pajooh, and Aidin Mosanen, "Shariati chegooneh sadershod" ("How Shariati Was Exported"), *Andisheh Pooya* (Tehran) Ordibehesht-Khordad 1391/May-June 2012, 66-73.

Over the last three and a half decades, as during his own life, Shariati's thought has been the subject of passionate and polarizing debate by many Iranian and non-Iranian commentators. In examining his thought and legacy, these commentators have assessed, at times critically and at times sympathetically, various aspects of Shariati's work. Increasingly in recent years, Shariati's radical Islamic discourse has been analyzed from the perspective of the relationship between Islam and modernity. Both critics and sympathizers have tried to highlight some of the ways in which Shariati has influenced the encounter with and the negotiation of modernity in Iranian society. Despite this increased attention to Shariati's relevance for the ongoing debates on the content, the condition, and the negotiation of modernity, very little attention has been paid to the ways in which Shariati's intellectual heirs in post-revolutionary Iran have read and understood his revolutionary Islamic discourse and his encounter with the question of modernity. This appears to be a major gap in the existing literature on Shariati, and one which this dissertation seeks to address.

My aim in this dissertation is to examine a new reading of Shariati's Islamic thought by a group of contemporary Iranian thinkers and activists who have come to be known collectively as neo-Shariatis. In particular, my research sets out to answer the following question: How have neo-Shariatis read Shariati's Islamic thought in the post-revolutionary Iranian context, and how does this new reading contribute to the ongoing debates about the relationship between Islam and modernity in Iran and other contemporary Muslim societies? In the five chapters that follow the present introduction, I make a case that in post-

revolutionary Iran Shariati's thought has been read by his intellectual heirs as an unfinished project of indigenous modernity whose revival and continuation contributes to the simultaneous deconstruction of and the negotiation of a third way between hegemonic universalism (in the form of Eurocentric discourses of modernism and secularism) and essentialist particularism (in the form of nativist discourses of traditionalism and religious/ethnic identitarianism).

#### *ALI SHARIATI: AN ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY*

Ali Shariati was born on 23 November 1933 in the desert village of Kahak in the northeastern province of Khorasan.<sup>4</sup> His father, Mohammad Taghi Shariati, was a politically active and reform-minded Islamic preacher whose religious and political ideas left a lasting influence on the young Shariati. In 1944, Mohammad Taghi Shariati founded the Center for the Propagation of Islamic Truth (*kanun-e nashr-e haqayeq-e eslami*) in the provincial capital of Mashhad with the objective of disseminating and popularizing a modernist interpretation of Islamic teachings. Soon after its founding, the center also became a hub for political activism in support of the nationalist leader and Prime Minister of Iran from 1950 to 1953, Mohammad Mosaddegh. After the 1953 British and American backed coup d'état against Mosaddegh's democratically elected government, the father and son were among the founding members of the Mashhad branch of the clandestine pro-

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<sup>4</sup> Pouran Shariat-Razavi, *Tarhi az yek zendegi (Portrait of a Life)* (Tehran: Chapakhsh, 1376/1997), 3.

Mosaddegh organization, the National Resistance Movement (*nehzat-e mogavemat-e melli*).<sup>5</sup>

In 1955, Shariati entered the newly inaugurated Faculty of Literature at the University of Mashhad. Upon the completion of his Bachelor of Arts degree, he received a government scholarship to continue his graduate studies abroad. In 1959, Shariati arrived in Paris, where he enrolled at the University of Paris, and four years later, in June 1963, he received a doctorate degree (*doctorat d'université*) from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.<sup>6</sup> Despite majoring in History of Medieval Islam, during his doctoral studies Shariati reportedly created a program of study tailor-made to his own specific interests.<sup>7</sup> He spent much of his time at the Collège de France where leading French sociologist, Georges Gurvitch, taught classes on dialectical sociology and sociology of knowledge. He also audited a seminar on the sociology of Islam by another leading French sociologist and Islamic scholar, Jacques Berque.<sup>8</sup> According to his political biographer, Ali Rahnama, in addition to Gurvitch and Berque, three other figures left a deep and lasting impression on Shariati during his years in Paris. These three included prominent French Orientalist Louis Massignon, Martinique-born

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<sup>5</sup> Shariat-Razavi, *Tarhi az yek zendegi*, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Shariati's doctoral research, which was carried out under the supervision of French linguist and Iran scholar, Gilbert Lazard, included translating, correcting, and writing a commentary on *Fazayel-e Balkh* (*The Merits of Balkh*), a thirteenth century Persian work in Islamic hagiology by Safi al-Din Abu Bakr Balkhi.

<sup>7</sup> Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 117.

<sup>8</sup> Shariat-Razavi, *Tarhi az yek zendegi*, 69-70

revolutionary Frantz Fanon, and existentialist French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>9</sup>

In Paris, in addition to his involvement with a number of Iranian opposition groups Shariati also immersed himself in various revolutionary debates and radical anti-colonial and anti-imperialist activities that were taking place at the time. He was particularly influenced by the Algerian and Cuban revolutionaries, and even began translating from French to Farsi Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), as well as Ernesto Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961). Shariati is also reported to have been arrested and to have spent some nights at Paris' central police headquarters in February 1961 for participating at a rally held in front of the Belgian Embassy in protest to the execution of Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba.<sup>10</sup>

Despite his initial attraction to the Algerian and Cuban models of armed revolution and guerrilla warfare, Shariati gradually came to the belief that radical social and political transformation required not simply a change in power structures through a revolutionary takeover of the state, but rather a deep and bottom-up change in the consciousness of the masses. According to his wife, Pouran Shariat-Razavi, toward the end of his time in Paris, Shariati had arrived at the conclusion that the advocacy of armed struggle by the intellectual vanguard was a futile effort that only led to the further alienation of intellectuals from the

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<sup>9</sup> Rahnema, *Islamic Utopian*, 120

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

mainstream of the society.<sup>11</sup> She believes that while Shariati was deeply sympathetic to a generation of young committed revolutionaries who had raised arm in their fight against tyranny and injustice, he was nevertheless convinced of the primacy of raising consciousness and empowering people over armed struggle.<sup>12</sup> For Shariati, she argues, the task of revolutionary intellectuals was to develop a contextually grounded discourse of revolutionary consciousness on the basis of the "extraction," "reformation," and "refinement" of local and familiar cultural resources.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to Iran in 1964, Shariati was arrested at the border and incarcerated briefly for his work with Iranian opposition groups in Europe. After his release, he returned to Mashhad where he began to work as a high school teacher. Two years later, he was hired as an Assistant Professor in History at the University of Mashhad, where he taught courses on Iranian history, history of Islamic civilization, and history of world civilizations.<sup>14</sup> Shariati proved to be a popular teacher and a powerful orator, and very soon he was receiving invitations to deliver talks at university campuses across the country. In the late 1960s, he

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<sup>11</sup> Shariat-Razavi, *Tarhi az yek zendegi*, 83. Elsewhere in the book, Shariat-Razavi writes: "For Shariati, intellectuals and revolutionary leaders were the head of the revolutionary movement and the masses of the people its legs. He argued that intellectuals and revolutionaries must raise awareness among the masses and at the grassroots level and empower people to change the status quo into something more desirable. According to this logic, he concluded that to advance a revolution through the intellectual or the revolutionary class ... was to have the revolutionary movement walk on its head." See: Shariat-Razavi, *Tarhi az yek zendegi*, 166.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 107. As Shariat-Razavi and others have pointed out, even as a university professor, Shariati showed more interest in being a radical public intellectual than an academic in the strict sense of the term. Perhaps it was for the same reason that Shariati never produced a major scholarly work. The bulk of Shariati's thirty-six volume Collected Works consists of lectures that he delivered in his classes or in various public and private forums. Shariati's main preoccupation was not scholarly discipline or academic accuracy, but rather social commitment and radical change.

was invited to Tehran to speak at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad, a newly established modern religious institution aimed at engaging young educated urban classes in debates about Islamic thought, culture, and history. Between 1967 and 1972 Shariati was one of the main speakers at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad and he was also heavily involved in organizing a wide range of activities at the center, from educational classes to plays and painting exhibitions.

At the Hosseiniyeh Ershad, Shariati found a site of socio-political engagement that was perhaps better suited for his revolutionary objectives than the academic setting of the university. Combining his subversive political message with his modern interpretation of traditional Islamic doctrines, Shariati developed a revolutionary Islamic ideology that called for popular awareness, action, and movement in the face of oppression and injustice. Shariati's message was received enthusiastically by many young people, particularly the new educated and socially and economically disenfranchised classes. His speeches attracted thousands of religious and non-religious youth, and Hosseiniyeh Ershad became a major site for oppositional social and political activity against the Pahlavi regime.<sup>15</sup>

Predictably, his activities at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad angered both the Pahlavi regime and the traditionalist and conservative religious sectors. The regime's secret police and intelligence service (SAVAK) was alarmed by Shariati's increasing popularity and his revolutionary discourse. Many Shi'i clerics

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<sup>15</sup> Kamran Matin, "Decoding Political Islam: Uneven and Combined Development and Ai Shariati's Political Thought," in *International Relations and non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (London: Routledge, 2010), 115.

too were enraged by Shariati's radical criticism of traditional religious doctrines and of the conservative social and political role of the clergy. By the early 1970s, a number of major Shi'i Ulama including Abul Qasim Khoei, Sayyid Muhammad Hadi Milani, Sayyid Sadeq Rohani, and Muhammad Husayn Tabatabaei had issued religious rulings (*fatwa*) against Shariati, accusing him of heresy and opposition to Islam.<sup>16</sup> Soon after, the Pahlavi regime followed suit and by the mid-1970s Shariati's books had been banned and possessing them could have been cause for arrest.<sup>17</sup>

In 1972, Hosseinieh Ershad was closed under pressure from SAVAK, and Shariati went into hiding. He was eventually arrested in 1973 and placed in prison in Tehran for a period of eighteen months. After release from prison, Shariati returned to Mashhad, where he effectively lived under house arrest and his social interactions came to be closely monitored by the SAVAK.<sup>18</sup> Unable to teach at the university and speak at public forums, and growing increasingly impatient with restrictions on his social and political activities Shariati decided to leave the country and resume his work from abroad. In May 1977, despite a government imposed travel ban against him, Shariati managed to leave Iran arriving first in Brussels and then in South Hampton, England, where he was able to stay with a relative. Three weeks after his arrival in South Hampton, on 19 June 1977,

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<sup>16</sup> During this period, to escape the trap of SAVAK censorship and pressure from the conservative religious sector, during this period Shariati published a number of his works under various pseudonyms including Ali Eslamdoost, Ehsan Khorasani, Ali Alavi, Ali Raahnema, Ali Khorasani, Ali Sabzevaarzadeh, Ali Zamani, Ali Dehghannejad, and Reza Paydar. See: Shabani, Pajooh, and Mosanen, "*shariati chegooneh sader shod*," 71.

<sup>17</sup> Ali Rahnama, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnama (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 237-238.

<sup>18</sup> Shariat-Razavi, *Tarhi az yek zendegi*, 195.



Shariati died of a heart attack.<sup>19</sup> The news of his sudden death spread quickly and rumors implicating the SAVAK in a conspiracy to kill Shariati soon elevated his position to that of a martyr. Fearing that the Pahlavi regime may use Shariati's popularity for its own propaganda purposes, a decision was made by his friends and family not to return his body to Iran. Instead, it was decided to bury him in the Sayyida Zeinab Mosque in Damascus, Syria, the site of the burial place of Zaynab bint Ali, the granddaughter of the prophet of Islam and the daughter of the first Shi'i imam.

According to a Shi'i tradition, the fortieth day of his death (*chehelom*) was marked by various ceremonies in Iran and abroad. Of these, the major event attended by Shariati's family as well as by numerous prominent Iranian and non-Iranian intellectuals and activists took place in Beirut, Lebanon. The event, according to Rahnema, was "a mini-summit of liberation organizations."<sup>20</sup> Some of the attendees included representatives from the Palestine Liberation Organization, Lebanese Resistance Detachments (AMAL), People's Front for the Liberation of Eritrea, the National Liberation Movement of Zanzibar, the National Movement for the Freedom of Zimbabwe, the National Movement for the Freedom of Southern Philippines, the Militant Clergy of Iran, the Organization of Iranian Muslim Students in Europe, America, and Canada, and Iran Freedom Movement.<sup>21</sup> Speaking at the ceremony, Palestinian nationalist leader and the chair of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, said: "Dr. Shariati is not only an Iranian

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<sup>19</sup> Since no autopsy was conducted after Shariati's sudden death, the reasons for his heart attack remain unknown today.

<sup>20</sup> Rahnema, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel," 243-4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

combatant nor one limited to this region. He is a Palestinian, Lebanese, Arab and also an international fighter."<sup>22</sup> Lebanese Shi'i leader, Musa al-Sadr, too, described Shariati as a transnational revolutionary who sought to develop an indigenous anti-imperialist and emancipatory discourse in the context of Muslim societies.<sup>23</sup>

#### *SHARIATI'S THOUGHT AND LEGACY BEYOND THE 1979 REVOLUTION*

In the months after Shariati's death, his fiery speeches in support of revolutionary action were circulated widely in Iran, and in the revolutionary protests of the late 1970s many protestors in Tehran and other cities carried banners displaying Shariati's pictures and quotes. Just weeks before the February 1979 revolution, one Iranian observer commented that despite the participation of a diverse range of political groups and social sectors, Shariati's portraits and words had become the symbols of the prevailing "ideological dimension" of the revolution.<sup>24</sup> In numerous books and articles written about his thought and legacy in the years after the 1979 uprising, Shariati came to be seen as the "teacher," "ideologue," and "architect" of the revolutionary movement.<sup>25</sup> In many of these accounts, the rise of a powerful and unifying Islamic revolutionary ideology during the late

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<sup>22</sup> Rahnema, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel," 243.

<sup>23</sup> Musa Sadr, "Sokhanraani emam Musa Sadr dar arbaeen-e shariati" ("Lecture by Imam Musa Sadr at the Fortieth day of Shariati's Death"), <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=182> (accessed on Monday, May 27, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Mansour Farhang, "Resisting the Pharaohs: Ali Shariati on Oppression," *Race & Class* 21, no. 1 (July 1979): 31.

<sup>25</sup> See: Rahnema, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel"; Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford U Press, 1983), 191-214; Mehdi Abedi, "Ali Shariati: The Architect of the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran," *Iranian Studies* 19, no. 3-4 (1986): 229-234; Ervand Abrahamian, "Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports*, no. 102, *Islam and Politics* (January 1982): 24-28.

1970s and the ascendancy to power of an Islamic state in the post-revolutionary context were due, in no small part, to the popularity of Shariati's radical reformulation of Islamic doctrines and his critical position toward the Westernization and modernization of Iranian society.

According to some commentators Shariati's legacy in post-revolutionary Iran has been kept alive in the major discourses and institutions of the Islamic Republic, including in the new regime's hostility toward the West and Western modernity as well as in the religiously mediated political structure of *velayat-e faqih* (the guardianship of the Islamic jurist).<sup>26</sup> For others yet, Shariati's significance as a Muslim revolutionary and an Islamic ideologue effectively came to an end with the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty and the success of the Iranian revolution.<sup>27</sup> According to Iranian intellectual, Ehsan Naraghi, for example, Shariati's discourse was a product of the particular local, regional, and international context in the 1960s and 1970s and the revolutionary, utopian, and ideological fervor of that period. In his view, "once [Iranian] society underwent a revolutionary phase, there was not much left in Shariati's thought that would be relevant for the post-revolutionary project."<sup>28</sup>

Despite the pronouncement of Shariati's thought as a finished revolutionary project by some of his critics, in the fourth decade of his death

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<sup>26</sup> See: Abdolkarim Soroush, *Az shariati (On Shariati)* (Tehran: Serat, 1384/2006), 8-9; Ali Mirsepassi, "Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006), 416.

<sup>27</sup> Chapter One will assess this claim in more detail.

<sup>28</sup> Ehsan Naraghi, "Tafakor gheir-demokratik-e Shariati aamel-e nakami eslaahaat" ("Shariati's anti-Democratic Thought Responsible for the Failure of Reformism"), *Etemaad Melli*, 29 Khordad 1385/19 June 2006, [http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=237#post\\_486](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=237#post_486) (accessed Tuesday, May 14, 2013).

Shariati remains a controversial and polarizing figure who continues to occupy a significant and influential place in the ongoing sociopolitical and intellectual debates both in Iran and beyond. While some critics argue that his revolutionary discourse may have advertently or inadvertently served the political objectives of those who came to power after the revolution, Shariati's family and friends have often maintained that had he been alive in post-revolutionary Iran he would have likely ended up in prison for his dissenting political and religious views. In fact, even though in the immediate post-revolution era streets and schools were named after Shariati and he was praised as one of the teachers of the revolution, in the course of the last three decades Shariati's Islamic discourse has fallen increasingly out of favor with the official guardians of the post-revolution regime. In post-revolutionary Iran Shariati's intellectual followers have often faced censorship, imprisonment, and other restrictions, and various groups and political organizations associated with Shariati's thought have been declared unlawful and counter-revolutionary.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of these and other pressures Shariati's thought continues to find new audiences in post-revolutionary Iran and his books continue to enjoy wide readership among Iranians, and particularly among the youth.<sup>30</sup> Numerous books, conference proceedings, special journal and magazine issues, and newspaper

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<sup>29</sup> Some of the leading neo-Shariati figures whose ideas are examined in this dissertation, including Reza Alijani, Taghi Rahmai, and Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari have spent many years in jail in the post-revolution era, and groups like the Nationalist-Religious Coalition (*etelaaf-e melli mazhabi*) that are associated with some of Shariati's followers have faced severe political restrictions.

<sup>30</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, "Islamic Reformist Discourses in Iran: Proponents and Prospects," in *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2008), 56.

articles are published every year analyzing various aspects of Shariati's thought and examining their relevance for the ongoing social, political, cultural, and philosophical debates in Iranian society. Additionally, in recent years Shariati's thought and legacy has been the subject of several MA and PhD dissertations by a new generation of Iranian researchers and academics.<sup>31</sup> These research projects have revealed the complexity and multidimensionality of Shariati's intellectual projects and have drawn attention to some of the previously neglected or under-examined aspects of his thought. Many of these contributions have been particularly interested in examining the ways in which Shariati's thought relates to topics that emerged as pressing social and political issues in the post-revolutionary period, including democracy, secularism, human rights, citizenship rights, gender equality, and individual and collective identity. Far from seeing it as a finished discourse, these works often present a picture of Shariati's thought as an unfinished social and intellectual project that continues to offer important insights about the conditions of modern social and political change in the contemporary Iranian society.

Outside of Iran too, and particularly in many Muslim majority societies, Shariati's thought continues to find new audiences and to influence ongoing social, political, and intellectual debates.<sup>32</sup> As early as in the late 1970s Shariati's works and the translations of his works appeared in Afghanistan, Turkey, Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, capturing the attention to various Islamic and leftist

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<sup>31</sup> See: *Shariati dardaneshgah* (Shariati at the University), ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Bonyad Farhangi-e Doctor Ali Shariati, 1390/2011).

<sup>32</sup> See: Shabani, Pajooh, and Mosanen, "Shariati chegooneh sader shod."

currents. Many of these translations have been reprinted several times, and in more recent years the full collection of Shariati's works has been released in both Turkish and Arabic. A number of Shariati's books have also been translated and published in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, and Bosnia. For many religious and leftist intellectuals in these countries, Shariati's critical position toward Western hegemony and imperialist relations of domination, his critique of Westernization and modernization policies of the post-colonial Muslim states, his discourse of revolutionary consciousness and popular movement, his attention to local knowledge and his view about the limitation of Eurocentric analytical frameworks for understanding the particular condition of Muslim societies, his modernist interpretation of Islamic teachings, and his synthesis of Islam and socialism, offer a novel and contextually grounded discourse of social and political change for Muslim societies. Another appealing aspect of Shariati's thought for his non-Iranian and non-Shi'i readers in Muslim countries is the way in which Shariati's Islamic discourse transcends the sectarian divides between Shi'ism and Sunism. As noted by a number of scholars, even though Shariati draws on concepts from the Shi'i tradition, by citing various Sunni scholars and by distinguishing between the oppressive and emancipatory aspects of Shi'ism, Shariati effectively highlights the commonalities between progressive currents in Shi'i and Sunni traditions.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, "Interview," in *Shariati dar daneshgah* (Shariati at the University), ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Bonyad Farhangi-e Doctor Ali Shariati, 1390/2011), 114; Hamid Algar, *The Roots of the Islamic Revolution*, Islamic Foundation Press, 1988, 49, <http://www.islamimmalayalam.com/books/q.%20The%20Roots%20of%20the%20Islamic%20Revolution%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed on January 12, 2013).

Finally, beyond the context of Iran and other Muslim societies, in recent years an increasing number of scholars have begun to see Shariati as one of the major voices of contemporary non-Western thought.<sup>34</sup> In making a case for moving beyond the dichotomous forces of Westerncentrism and culturalism and for opening up a cross-cultural dialogue between the West and the excluded others, American political theorist, Fred Dallmayr, identifies Shariati as one of the advocates of such an approach in modern Islamic thought.<sup>35</sup> In Dallmayr's reading, Shariati's attempt to invoke the liberating capacities of Islamic thought in conversation with other (monotheistic) religious traditions and modern Western thought opens up room for interreligious and intercultural empathy and understanding.<sup>36</sup> For other commentators, Shariati's relevance is in his contribution to the discourse of decoloniality. Among others, Australian sociologist, Raewyn Connell, sees Shariati as one of the leading thinkers from the global South to have challenged the Eurocentric dynamics of knowledge production and the exclusion of non-European and non-Western voices. According to Connell, Shariati believed that freedom from imperial domination and Western hegemony required the appropriation or "the rediscovery of local identity or selfhood," and emancipation from the "bourgeois cultures" that had been imposed across the globe in the course of European colonial expansion.<sup>37</sup> She argues that while Shariati did not reject modern European sociological

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<sup>34</sup> See: Walter Mignolo, "Yes, we Can: Non-European Thinkers and Philosophers," Al-Jazeera, 19 February 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/02/20132672747320891.html> (accessed March 13, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Fred Dallmayr, *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998) 92.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 92-94.

<sup>37</sup> Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 134.

concepts such as class, ideology, and revolution, in the particular context of Iran his religious discourses "provided a radical alternative to European secularism as a ground for social theory."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in a number of his recent works, prominent Argentine scholar, Walter Mignolo, has drawn attention to what he sees as Shariati's contribution to the de-colonization of knowledge and the academy. According to Mignolo, Shariati was one of the early advocates of "de-coloniality" or an epistemic de-linking from the colonial modes of knowledge and understanding.<sup>39</sup> He further argues that in the context of mid-twentieth century Iran, Shariati's critical engagement with colonial modernity and his radical restructuring of Islamic thought constitutes "a struggle for decolonization of knowledge and being."<sup>40</sup> Malaysian sociologist, Syed Farid Alatas, too, describes Shariati as one of the leading twentieth century critics of "the lingering psychological dimension of colonialism" along with such figures as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, and Malek Bennabi.<sup>41</sup> According to Alatas, as a radical Muslim thinker who was thoroughly familiar with both Western thought and the particular conditions of his local context, Shariati sought to replace the prevailing Eurocentric modes of analysis with a cosmopolitan frame of thought which gave recognition to social and cultural diversity and difference.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Connell, *Southern Theory*, 222.

<sup>39</sup> See: Walter Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 449-514.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xxx.

<sup>41</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science: Responses to Eurocentrism* (London and California: Sage Publications, 2006), 52.

<sup>42</sup> Alatas, "Interview," 114.



## Why Islam and Modernity?

As noted by a number of commentators, much of what has been said and written about Shariati in recent years has sought to determine the relationship between his Islamic discourse and the debates on the condition and negotiation of modernity in Iran and other Muslim societies.<sup>43</sup> For his critics, Shariati's radical Islamic discourse contributed not only to the popularization of a counter-modern Islamic ideology in Iran, but also to the rise of pro-Islamist, counter-modern, and anti-Western sentiments in other Muslim societies. Critics argue that the counter-modern disposition of Shariati's Islamic thought was manifested in his social and political discourse in the form of opposition to secularism, democracy, and individual rights and freedoms.<sup>44</sup> For his sympathizers, on the other hand, far from constituting a rejection of modernity, Shariati's modern restructuring of Islamic thought was an effort to advance a contextually grounded, egalitarian, and democratic discourse of modern sociopolitical development in the particular context of Iranian society. Highlighting what they see as Shariati's modern and humanist interpretation of Islamic doctrines, they argue that the ongoing negotiation of a range of modern sociopolitical concepts such as civil society, pluralism, civil and political rights, democracy, secularism, human rights, and

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<sup>43</sup> Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, *Tabar-shenasi-e aghlaniat-e modern: ghara'ati post-modern az andisheh doktor Ali Shariati (A Genealogy of Modern Rationality: A Post-Modern Reading of the Thought of Dr. Ali Shariati)* (Tehran: Naghd-e Farhang, 1381/2002), 7; Farid Khatami, "Panel," in *Shariati dar daneshgah (Shariati at the University)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Bonyad Farhangi-e Doctor Ali Shariati, 1390/2011), 25.

<sup>44</sup> See: Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Farzin Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations of Islamic Revolutionary Discourse in Iran: Vacillations on Human Subjectivity," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 14 (1999): 50-73; Jahanbakhsh, Forough, *Islam, Democracy and Religious Modernism in Iran (1953-2000): From Bazargan to Soroush* (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2001).

gender equality in post-revolutionary Iran cannot be properly understood without attending to the influence of Shariati's brand of Islamic thought in Iranian society.<sup>45</sup>

That many commentators have examined Shariati's Islamic discourse in relation to the negotiation of modernity is itself an indication of the centrality of the question of modernity in Iran and other Muslim societies. As one scholar points out, ever since the nineteenth century encounter with European colonialism, the question of modernity has constituted "the central issue in many Middle Eastern and Islamic societies ... at the theoretical as well as the practical level."<sup>46</sup> Throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and continuing today, a perceived tension between modernity and Islamic tradition has been one of the defining features of the major social, political, philosophical, and cultural debates in the Muslim world. Traditionalists often see the subjugation of Muslim societies to European colonialism and Western imperialism as a consequence of straying away from the Islamic heritage and call for bypassing modernity and embracing Islam's cultural and religious traditions. Modernists, on

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<sup>45</sup> See: Abbas Manoochehri, "Critical Religious Reason: Ali Shari'ati on Religion, Philosophy and Emancipation," *Polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* 4 (2003), <http://them.polylog.org/4/fma-en.htm> (accessed 28 January 2012) ; Masoomeh Aliakbari, *Gherati falsafi az yek zed-e filsoof: derang-haayii degar-andishaaneh dar matni bi-payan beh nam-e doctor Ali Shariati (A Philosophical Reading of an Anti-Philosopher: Alternative Reflections on an Endless Text Called Dr. Ali Shariati)* (Tehran: Ghalam, 1386/2007); Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "A Critical Review of the Iranian Attempts at the Development of Alternative Sociologies," in *Facing Unequal World: Challenges For a Global Sociology*, Volume Two: Asia, ed. Michael Burawoy, Mau-kuei Chang, and Michelle Fei-yu Hsieh, (Taiwan: Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica, Council of National Association of the International Sociological Association, and Academia Sinica, 2010), 36-70; Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Post-Islamist Trends in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011): 94-109.

<sup>46</sup> Farzin Vahdat, "Critical Theory and the Islamic Encounter with Modernity," in *Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity*, ed. Michael Thompson (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 123.

the other hand, often attribute the existing social, political, and economic problems of contemporary Middle Eastern and North African societies to the absence of modernity and call for radical change along the lines of the existing models of Western modernity. Seeking to negotiate an alternative to the extremes of modernism and traditionalism, a third group calls for negotiating a new vision of change for Muslim societies through a synthesis between local religious/cultural traditions and modern norms and institutions.<sup>47</sup>

Since the late nineteenth century, the question of the relationship between Islam and modernity has also dominated debates about contemporary Muslim politics and social life with the Western academy. Masud and Salvatore (2009) distinguish between two slightly different articulations of this view in contemporary Western thought. The first, represented by leading Orientalists such as Gustave E. von Grunbaum, held that Islam and Muslim societies were essentially incapable of reforming and adopting the achievements of the modern world. The second view, represented by modernization theorists such as Daniel Lerner, held that even though Islam lacked the necessary resources for initiating modernity, Muslim societies could nevertheless become modern by following the Western path of modernization.<sup>48</sup> Although the second view may be said to have

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<sup>47</sup> The experience of Muslim societies in this regard is not radically different from the experiences of other non-Western societies faced with the force of colonial modernity. For a discussion on the debates on modernism and traditionalism in the Indian context see: Fred Dallmayr and G.N. Devy, ed., *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity: A Twentieth Century Anthology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998). Also see: Fred Dallmayr, *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> Mohammad Khalid Masud and Armando Salvatore, "Western Scholars of Islam on the Issue of Modernity," in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Mohammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore, and Martin van Buuren (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 40-42.

offered a somewhat more optimistic vision of the prospects for modernity in Muslim societies, it is clear that in both accounts modernity was understood as a Western achievement and as something alien to Islam and Muslim cultures.

The occurrence of a number of events during the latter half of the previous century and the beginning of the present century reinforced the Western view about the irreconcilability of Islam and modernity. The first was the rise of Islamism during the 1970s and 1980s, which was interpreted by many Western scholars and observers as a turn against modernity.<sup>49</sup> It was precisely through this lens that these commentators viewed the 1979 revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran. Another event was the end of the Cold War. With the implosion of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, Islam and Muslim societies of the Middle East and North Africa came to be seen as the other of the modern West and the enemy of modernity.<sup>50</sup> As Mahmood Mamdani notes in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (2005), in the construction of the hegemonic post-Cold War narratives of the modern West and its others, Muslim societies came to be seen not only as "incapable" of modernizing, but also as being inherently hostile and "resistant" to modernity.<sup>51</sup> In the post-Cold War context, the assumption of an imminent and inevitable clash between Western modernity and the Islamic aversion to modernity found a clear manifestation in

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<sup>49</sup> Talal Asad, "Religion, Nation-State, Secularism," in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, ed. Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 178.

<sup>50</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthoughts in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 18; Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

<sup>51</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005), 19.

the discourse of the clash of civilizations popularized, among others, by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington.<sup>52</sup> Finally, there were the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent United States- led invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, in the aftermath of which the view of an insurmountable discord between Islam and modernity came to dominate both mainstream and academic debates.<sup>53</sup>

The Islam-modernity binary advanced by traditionalist and modernist discourses in Muslim societies and by Orientalist and modernization theorists in the West presents an unsophisticated picture of two clearly-defined and mutually-exclusive entities. Yet, the critical deconstruction of these essentialist discourses by a wide range of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in recent decades has revealed the multifarious and contested nature of both categories of Islam and modernity. It has shown that existing social, political, and economic conditions and challenges in the Middle East and North Africa are not reducible to simplistic

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<sup>52</sup> See: Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage: Why So Many Muslims Deeply Resent the West, and Why Their Bitterness Will Not Be Easily Mollified," *The Atlantic Monthly* 26, no. 3 (September 1990): 47-58; Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-50; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> In his 2002 book entitled, *What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*, Bernard Lewis chronicled what he saw as the history of Muslim resistance to modernity and change. Examining this history, Lewis argued, could help to explain the kind of sentiments and attitudes in contemporary Muslim societies that had produced the events of September 11. In the book, Lewis advanced a narrative of modernity as a European achievement that Muslim societies lacked and could only achieve with help from and by following the path of the modern West. Adopting modernity, he claimed, required not only modernization through the import of modern technologies and economic structures, but also Westernization or the adoption of social, cultural, and civilizational achievements of the West such as democracy, secularism, freedom, and gender equality. Modernity, Lewis contended, meant abandoning the Iranian model of traditionalism and return to an authentic Islamic past and embracing the Turkish/Kemalist model of Westernization and secular democracy. Also see: Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: Random House, 2004); Irshad Manji, *The Trouble with Islam* (Toronto: Random House, 2003); Salman Rushdie, "Yes, This is about Islam," *New York Times*, Nov 02, 2001, A25.

explanations such as the absence of modernity or the irreconcilability of modernity and local cultural/religious traditions. It has also shown that in the context of Muslim societies (both historically and presently) we cannot speak of Islam as a singular, totalizing, and deterministic category. Instead, we must speak of Islams as plural categories that reflect diverse modes of cultural, social, political, and economic relations and formations. Similarly, the critique of the Islam-modernity binary has drawn attention to the ongoing contestation over the notion of modernity. It has shown that in the context of Muslim societies, as in the rest of the global South, modernity is not simply a category through which to advance a discourse of development and progress against the forces of traditionalism and conservatism. Ever since the nineteenth century acceleration of European colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa modernity has also functioned in this region as a discourse of coloniality and of imperial domination. Moreover, the critique of the binary of Islam and modernity has contributed to the ongoing delinking of modernity from the experiences of the modern West and has highlighted the diversity and multiplicity of historical and existing modernities in various human societies.

By examining Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought through the analytical lens of Islam and modernity, this dissertation hopes to contribute to some of the ongoing debates which were summarily mentioned here. In its simultaneous critique of modernism and traditionalism, Shariati's thought represents an effort from within contemporary Islamic thought to go beyond the essentialist dichotomy of Islam and modernity and to identify an alternative

framework through which to address the challenges and prospects of progressive sociopolitical and socioeconomic change in Iran and other Muslim societies. By using this analytical lens, the research also aims to explore some of the ways in which Shariati's critical engagement with the colonially mitigated and Eurocentric narratives of modernity and his effort to identify an alternative ontological basis for negotiation a contextually grounded and non-dominating vision of modernity may contribute to the post-colonial project of re-appropriation and de-colonization of modernity.

## **Research Overview**

### *BACKGROUND*

One of the first challenges that arises in attempting to examine new readings of Shariati's thought by his contemporary intellectual followers is determining precisely who represents Shariati and his discourse in post-revolutionary Iranian society. Both during his life and after his death, Shariati's Islamic discourse has been understood and interpreted in different and often clashing ways. As Abrahamian notes, during the heat of the popular uprising against the Pahlavi dynasty and in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 revolution, Shariati's name and his legacy was claimed by rival political groups.<sup>54</sup> Commentators have also noted that in the post-revolution context Shariati's former students and supporters

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<sup>54</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, "Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports*, no. 102, *Islam and Politics* (January 1982), 28.

often pursued radically different political paths.<sup>55</sup> While some of those who had come under the influence of Shariati's revolutionary Islamic discourse during the 1960s and 1970s supported the establishment of the Islamic Republic under the leadership of Ruhollah Khomeini and joined the rank and file of the new regime, others distanced themselves from the Islamic state and joined a number of opposition groups.<sup>56</sup> In today's Iran, too, a number of political organizations continue to be associated with Shariati's intellectual and political legacy. Of these, the most prominent group is the Nationalist-Religious Coalition (*etelaaf-e melli mazhabi*), an opposition organization which pledges allegiance to the ideals of

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<sup>55</sup> Hunter, "Islamic Reformist Discourses," 56.

<sup>56</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush and Mir Hossein Mousavi are among the most prominent figures of the first group. Soroush, who was a young graduate of philosophy when the revolution took place, was appointed by Khomeini to the Cultural Revolution Institute (*setad-e enghelab-e farhangi*) and played an active role in what became known as the Iranian Cultural Revolution (*enghelab-e farhangi-e Iran*) between 1980 and 1988. Mousavi, a thirty-six year old architect at the time of the revolution, was appointed by Khomeini to the Council of the Islamic Revolution (*shoray-e enghelab-e eslami*) in 1979, and served as the Prime Minister of Iran between 1981 and 1989. In the years that followed, both men gradually moved away from the discourses and policies of Iran's Islamist rulers and today are considered among the leading oppositional voices. Soroush has lived in a self-imposed exile in the United States since 2000. Mousavi, who ran in the 2009 presidential election on a reformist platform and was one of the leading figures of the protest movement that emerged in the aftermath of that election (the Green Movement), has lived under house arrest since 2011 along with his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, herself a frequent attendee of Shariati's lectures at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad and the Chancellor of Alzahra University in Tehran from 1998 to 2006. Among the opposition groups which sought to follow Shariati's social and political path in post-revolutionary Iran the largest was The Organization of the Vanguard Fighters of the Oppressed (*sazman-e razmandegan-e pishgam-e mostazafin*), also known as Aspirations of the Oppressed (*arman-e mostazafin*). Some members of the group including the group's leader, Mohammad Bagher Borzoui, were jailed in the early 1980s. Another opposition group with which some of Shariati's followers were involved during the late 1970s and early 1980s was the Organization of Revolutionary Monotheists (*sazman-e movahedin enghelabi*). Some of the leading members of this group including Reza Alijani and Taghi Rahmani are today considered among the prominent neo-Shariati figures. A number of other opposition groups including the Organization of the People's Mojahedin of Iran (*sazman-e mojahedin khalgh-e Iran*), and the Forghan Group (*gorooh-e forghan*) were also believed to be somewhat sympathetic to Shariati's ideas. The former group initially backed Khomeini, but by the early 1980s it was engaged in armed conflict with the Islamic Republic. The latter group, which was significantly smaller and lesser known than the Mojahedin, appealed to Shariati's radical critique of the clerical establishment to legitimize the assassination of a number of prominent clerical supporters of the new regime including Morteza Motahari (1920-1979) and Mohammad Mofatteh (1928-1979).



both Mosaddegh and Shariati and supports democratic social and political reforms.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I have chosen to focus my attention on a group of Shariati's followers who have come to be known in post-revolutionary Iran as neo-Shariatis. More than representing a particular political group or organization, neo-Shariatis represent an intellectual current that seeks to advance Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity and to represent his intellectual and sociopolitical preoccupations and commitments. While in the post-revolution context many of Shariati's former students and followers gradually distanced themselves from his revolutionary discourse, figures associated with the neo-Shariati school have consistently self-identified as heirs to Shariati's radical religious and sociopolitical discourse and have focused much of their intellectual work on introducing Shariati to a new generation of Iranians and challenging what they see as misreadings of his thought and legacy.

One of the main factors that distinguishes neo-Shariatis from other groups or currents of Shariati's (former or current) followers is their sustained and rigorous engagement with Shariati's text and his complete thirty-six volume Collected Works as the representation of his overall project. It must be noted that the full text of Shariati's works including his writings, translations, university lessons, public and private lectures, and letters to colleagues, friends, and family was only published years after his death, allowing the emergence of a fuller picture of the various aspects of his social, political, and religious thought. Other than a few works including his major sociological analysis of Islamic history

which he published under the title of *Islamology (eslam-shenasi)*, what was available of Shariati's work in pre-revolution Iran was often published without his supervision and consisted of transcribed versions of his lectures at the Hosseinieh Ershad and other venues.

After Shariati's death, his family and friends founded The Bureau for Compilation and Systematization of Ali Shariati's Works (*daftar-e tadvin va tanzim-e asaar-e Ali Shariati*), in order to collect and coordinate the publication of the full collection of his works.<sup>57</sup> The first volume of Shariati's Collected Works, titled *With Acquainted Audiences (Ba mokhatab-hay-e ashena)* was published in 1978, and the final volume, titled *Early Writings (Asar-e javani)* was published in 2006. After the revolution, Shariati's family and friends also founded Shariati's Cultural Foundation (*bonyad-e farhangi-e Shariati*) which maintains archives of works on Shariati and publishes a periodical titled *The Foundations Notebooks (Daftarhay-e bonyad)*. Moreover, in the 1990s a group of Shariati's followers founded an independent think-tank under the name of Ali Shariati Research Bureau (*daftar-e pajoohesh-hay-e Ali Shariati*) which sought to create an independent and grassroots forum for discussing and critically analyzing Shariati's intellectual legacy as well as the works of Shariati's followers in post-revolutionary Iran.

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<sup>57</sup> In addition to compiling and publishing the full collection of Shariati's works, the Bureau also produced other publications on Shariati's thought and legacy. For some examples see: Ali Jaanzaadeh, ed., *Doktor Ali Shariati (Doctor Ali Shariati)* (Tehran: Hamgam and Daftar-e tadvin va tanzim-e asaar-e Ali Shariati, 1358/1979); Daftar-e tadvin va tanzim-e asaar-e Ali Shariati, ed., *Farhang-e loghat-e kotob-e doktor Ali Shariati (The Dictionary of Ali Shariati's Books)* (Tehran: Ferdowsi, 1362/1983).

In examining the new readings of Shariati's thought by his contemporary intellectual followers, the present research has focused primarily on the works of seven individuals associated with the three aforementioned groups: Ehsan Shariati, Susan Shariati, Sara Shariati, Hossein Mesbahian, Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, Reza Alijani, and Taghi Rahmani. Of these individuals, the first three are Shariati's children. Ehsan Shariati (b. 1959) holds a doctorate in philosophy from the New Sorbonne University in Paris. After returning to Iran in 2007 he taught at Tehran University and the Islamic Azad University as a visiting professor before being banned from holding university positions by Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in 2013.<sup>58</sup> Susan Shariati (b. 1962) holds a doctorate in history from the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in Paris. She currently resides in Iran and works as a freelance journalist and a researcher at Shariati's Cultural Foundation. Sara Shariati (b. 1964) holds a doctorate in sociology from the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in Paris. She is currently an Assistant Professor in Tehran University's Faculty of Social Sciences. Mesbahian (b. 1964) holds a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Toronto. He is currently a Professor at Tehran University's Faculty of Social Sciences, and works closely with Shariati's Cultural Foundation. Yousefi Eshkevari (b. 1950) was one of the founders of Ali Shariati Research Bureau. An Islamic theologian as well as a journalist and a political activist, Yousefi Eshkevari served a prison sentence from 2002 to 2005 for criticizing theocracy and challenging the state's interpretation of Islamic law. He left the

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<sup>58</sup> See: "Mohammad Zamiran and Dr. Ehsan Shariati are Suspended," Iran Daily Brief, 8 March 2013, <http://www.irandailybrief.com/2013/03/08/mohammad-zamiran-and-dr-ehsan-shariati-are-suspended/> (accessed 10 July 2013).

country in 2009 and currently resides in Germany.<sup>59</sup> Alijani (b. 1963) was also among the founders of Ali Shariati Research Bureau. He is a well-known journalist and political activist who served various prison sentences for his activities before leaving Iran in 2011. He currently resides in France.<sup>60</sup> Rahmani (b. 1960) too was an active member of Ali Shariati Research Bureau. Also a journalist and political activist, Rahmani served several short- and long-term prison sentences before leaving Iran in 2012 and taking residence in France.<sup>61</sup>

### RESEARCH DESIGN

In this dissertation I have drawn on a range of qualitative comparative research methods. The data gathering phase of the research involved literature review, document collection, and semi-structured open-ended interviews. In the near

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<sup>59</sup> Yousefi Eshkevari has also authored and co-authored a number of books on Ali Shariati's thought. Some of these include: Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, Chera Shariati (Why Shariati) (Tehran: Daftar-e pajooresh-hay-e Ali Shariati, 1376); Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, ed., *Miaad ba Ali: yadvareh shanzdahomin salgard-e shahadat-e doktor Ali Shariati (Rendezvous with Ali: Commemorating the Sixteenth Anniversary of Dr. Ali Shariati's Martyrdom)* (Tehran and Qom: Tafakor, 1372/1993); Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, ed., *Miaad ba Ali: yadvareh hefdahomin salgard-e shahadat-e doktor Ali Shariati (Rendezvous with Ali: Commemorating the Seventeenth Anniversary of Dr. Ali Shariati's Martyrdom)* (Tehran and Qom: Tafakor, 1373/1994); Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, ed., *Miaad ba Ali: yadvareh hejdahomin salgard-e shahadat-e doktor Ali Shariati (Rendezvous with Ali: Commemorating the Eighteenth Anniversary of Dr. Ali Shariati's Martyrdom)* (Tehran and Qom: Tafakor, 1372/1994).

<sup>60</sup> Alijani is also the author and/or editor of several books about Shariati's thought and legacy. Some of these include: Reza Alijan, *Rend-e kham: shariati-shenasi jeld-e yekom: zamaneh, zendegi, va arman-ha (The Pure Nonconformist: Shariatology Volume One: Era, Life, and Ideals)* – Second Edition (Tehran: Ghalam 1387/2008); Reza Alijani, *Eslah-e enghelabi: shariati-shenasi jeld-e dovom (Revolutionary Reform: Shariatology, Volume Two)* (Tehran: Yadavaran, 1381/2002); Reza Alijani, *Seh Shariati dar ayineh zehn-e ma: eslam-garay-e enghelabi, motefaker-e mosleh, rend-e aref (Three Shariatis in Our Perceptions: Revolutionary Islamist, Reformist Intellectual, Artful Mystic)* (Tehran: Ghalam, 1389/2010); Reza Alijani, *Shariat va gharb (Shariati and the West)*. Tehran: Ghalam, 1388/2009.

<sup>61</sup> Rahmani has discussed Shariati's ideas in a number of his published work including: Taghi Rahmani, *Shariati va masa-el-e no-garaayee emrooz (Shariati and Contemporary Debate around Modernization)* (no publisher, 1375/1996); Taghi Rahmani, *Aashooraha dar zamaaneh-haa (Ashuras in Different Contexts)* (Qazvin: no publisher, 1376/1997); Taghi Rahmani, *Naghadi-e ghodrat: mavane nazari-e esteghraar-e demkrasi dar Iran (Critiquing Power: Normative Challenges in Democratic Consolidation in Iran)* (Tehran: Sarayee, 1381/2002).

absence of scholarly research on neo-Shariatis and their readings of Shariati's thought, the literature review entailed surveying the major academic literature on Shariati and the analyses of various Iranian and non-Iranian commentators on Shariati's views on modernity. The literature review also required surveying some of the major academic literature on the Islam-modernity as well as on the modernity-coloniality nexus. Document collection entailed gathering all of the accessible published and unpublished works of the above-mentioned neo-Shariati figures on Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity as well as on a variety of other topics. These included articles and interviews printed in Farsi language newspapers and magazines over the last three and a half decades. A comprehensive online archive of this material is maintained by Shariati's Cultural Foundation. These documents also include three issues of *The Foundations Notebooks* (*daftarhay-e bonyad*) containing the works of a number of leading neo-Shariati figures. The first two issues were published in Iran respectively in 2001 and 2003. The third issue has not yet received publication permit from Iranian government and was released unofficially in 2013 year by Shariati's Cultural Foundation. I was also entrusted with a number of unpublished works, including articles and interviews, by prominent neo-Shariati figures.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Even though the dissertation focuses on neo-Shariati readings of Shariati's thought, the research inevitably required reading and translating to English some of Shariati's original text, with particular attention to his views on the condition and negotiation of modernity in the context of Iran and other Muslim societies. It must be noted that the present work does not claim or intend to offer a detailed analysis of Shariati's thirty-six volume Collected Works. Instead, to gain a better understanding and to provide a more comprehensive picture of neo-Shariati readings of Shariati, I have engaged most closely with those of Shariati's works that are highlighted and frequently referenced by neo-Shariatis. While Shariati's critics often focus on Shariati's works during his five years at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad (1967-1972) – with particular attention to lectures such as "Leadership and Community" ("*Ommat va imamat*") (1969), "Shi'ism, a Complete Party" ("*Shieh, yek hezb-e tamaam*") (1972), "Martyrdom" ("*Shahadat*") (1972) – neo-Shariatis seek to outline

In order to gain open and unmediated access to my research subjects, I chose to conduct face-to-face and semi-structured open-ended interviews with some of the leading neo-Shariatis. In line with the University of Alberta research requirements, ethics approval for these interviews was obtained from the university's Research Ethics Board of the Arts, Science, and Law. However, in the aftermath of the post-2009 presidential election uprising in Iran and the increased security pressures on many intellectual and social and political activists in the country, including on many neo-Shariati figures, a decision was made against travelling to Iran. Instead, arrangements were made to travel to Iran's neighbouring country, Turkey, to conduct interviews with Sara Shariati and Hossein Mesbahian during their attendance at the 9th biennial Iranian Studies Conference in Istanbul in August, 2012. Unfortunately, however, due to a travel ban issued by Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology dozens of Iran-based academics who were scheduled to participate in the conference,

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Shariati's broader intellectual preoccupations and to highlight some of the constant major themes in his discourse. As such, in examining neo-Shariati readings of Shariati's thought I have also carefully read and provided ample references to the following volumes of Shariati's collected works: C.W. 2: *Revolutionary Self-Preparation (Khodsazi enghelabi)*, C.W. 4: *Return (Bazgasht)*, C.W. 5: *Iqbal and US (Ma va Iqbal)*, C.W. 11: *The History of Civilization – volume 1 (Tarikh-e tamadon – jeld-e 1)*, C.W. 12: *The History of Civilization – volume 2 (Tarikh-e tamadon – jeld-e 2)*, C.W. 13: *Descend in Desert (Hoboot dar kavir)*, C.W. 20: *What is to be Done? (cheh bayad kard)*, C.W. 22: *Religion versus Religion (mazhab alaihe mazhab)*, C.W. 24: *Human (Ensan)*, and C.W. 31: *The Characteristics of the Recent Centuries (Vijegihay-e ghoroon-e jadid)*. Since Shariati's CW are organized thematically and not chronologically, the writings and lectures collected in each volume consists of Shariati's works over various periods of his life. As such, rather than seeking to present a picture of the evolution of certain themes over the course of Shariati's relatively short life and career, the research seeks to provide an overall picture of his intellectual preoccupations and his general socio-political orientation. Inevitably, and given the nature of Shariati's social and intellectual concerns and his revolutionary and ideological discourse, the picture presented in this dissertation may be marked by some normative tensions and factual inconsistencies. Nevertheless, it is my belief that despite potential tensions and contradictions, the overall picture that emerges outlines a coherent and more-or-less methodical analytical framework within which Shariati's Islamic thought encounters and responds to the question of modernity in the particular historical and sociopolitical context of mid-twentieth century Iran.

including Shariati and Mesbahian, were prevented from attending the Istanbul conference. Given the time constraints for completing the research, it was then decided to conduct the interviews over the phone rather than in person. The participants in these open-ended phone interviews included Sara Shariati (via telephone), Hossein Mesbahian (via Oovoo), and Reza Alijani (via Skype). Each interview lasted approximately one hour and thirty minutes. Prior to the interviews, the participants were provided with a brief written statement about the scope and objectives of the research. During the interviews, the participants were presented with a number of general questions as well as more specific follow up questions. The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and extensive handwritten notes were also produced during the course of these conversations.

The data preparation phase of the research involved transcribing various parts of the interviews, tying up interview notes, translating the Farsi language data into English, and arranging and coding the data thematically under four main subheadings: Shariati/neo-Shariatis and the genealogy of modernity; Shariati/neo-Shariatis and the Islam-modernity binary; Shariati/neo-Shariatis and Eurocentrism; Shariati/neo-Shariatis and nativism/identitarianism.

Finally, in analyzing the data this dissertation draws on the methods of context analysis and dialogical comparison. In applying context analysis, the dissertation gives attention to the prevailing social and historical conditions (contextual determinants) under which the texts of Shariati and neo-Shariatis are produced and their discourse of indigenous modernity is constructed. As Lazega points out, contextual analysis helps not only to determine the "constraints" and

"opportunities" that contextual determinants place on the outlook and behaviour of social and political agents within a specific setting, but also to identify the types of generalizations that may be appropriately made with regard to sociopolitical orientations, attitudes, and actions in differential contexts.<sup>63</sup> As such, in examining the social and political contexts of the discourses of Shariati and neo-Shariatis the dissertation is also attentive to the differential social and political demands that are articulated in the language of indigenous modernity in (Shariati's) pre-revolution and (neo-Shariatis') post-revolutionary Iranian society. Specifically, by drawing attention to the ascendancy of Islamism and the emergence of its counter-discourses in post-revolutionary Iranian society in Chapters One, Two, and Three, this dissertation attends to some of the major ways in which the consequences of the 1979 revolution have changed the sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of the intellectual productions of Shariati and his post-revolution followers. Similarly, by highlighting the historical particularities (i.e. sociocultural differences, subordinate military and economic position vis-à-vis the West, etc.) of the encounter with and the negotiation of modernity in Iran and other contemporary Muslim societies, Chapters Four and Five explore some of the differential functions of modernity and its counter-discourses in Western and non-Western contexts.

Furthermore, in examining the relevance of the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity for the ongoing and critical normative

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<sup>63</sup> See: Emmanuel Lazega, "Network Analysis and Qualitative Research: A Method of Contextualization," in *Context and Method in Qualitative Research*, ed. Gale Miller and Robert Dingwall (London: SAGE, 1997), 119. Also see: Paula Saukko, "Methodologies for Cultural Studies: An Integrative Approach," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research – Third Edition*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London: SAGE, 2005): 343-356.



reconfiguration of the discourse of modernity this dissertation draws on the method of dialogical comparison. Within the discipline of political science this method is often associated with the newly emerged subdiscipline of comparative political theory and particularly with the contributions of one its pioneers, American political scientist Fred Dallmayr.<sup>64</sup> Comparative political theory is described as a field of inquiry that reflects on "the status and meaning of political life" within a global context shaped by "the steadily intensifying interaction among previously (more or less) segregated ... cultural zones."<sup>65</sup> This emerging subdiscipline is also seen as a "hybrid" of political theory and comparative politics, even though its overall methodology problematizes both formal theory and the prevailing methodological approaches used by comparativists.<sup>66</sup> For Dallmayr, one of the major problems of conventional comparative analysis (particularly in Western scholarship) is that the researcher often assumes "the stance of a global overseer or universal spectator whose task consists basically in assessing the relative proximity or nonproximity of given societies to the

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<sup>64</sup> See: Fred Dallmayr ed., *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 1999); Andrew F. March, "What is Comparative Political Theory," in *The Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (2009): 531-565; Farah Godrej, "Response to 'What is Comparative Political Theory?'," in *The Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (2009): 567-582; Farah Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Joshua Simon, "Comparative Methods in the History of Political Thought," (paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA., September 2012, [http://www.academia.edu/2087994/Comparative\\_Methods\\_in\\_the\\_History\\_of\\_Political\\_Thought](http://www.academia.edu/2087994/Comparative_Methods_in_the_History_of_Political_Thought) (accessed 8 June 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Introduction: Toward a Comparative Political Theory," *The Review of Politics* 59, no. 3,

Non-Western Political Thought (Summer, 1997), 21.

<sup>66</sup> Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9.

established global yardstick."<sup>67</sup> Comparative political theory, by contrast, aims to arrive not at a universal standard, but rather at "shared meanings and practices" by highlighting "lateral interaction, negotiation, and contestation among different, historically grown cultural frameworks."<sup>68</sup>

As mentioned above, the preferred method utilized by Dallmayr and other comparative political theorists is that of "dialogical" comparison, which encourages "mutual interpretation" through attentiveness not only to difference, but also to border-crossings, cross-cultural encounters, and cross-linguistic equivalences.<sup>69</sup> As such, Dallmayr insists that "comparative theorists must necessarily be multilingual and well-trained in translation."<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Dallmayr argues that the method of dialogical comparison is ultimately rooted in a "hermeneutical" approach that attempts "to gain understanding through an intensive dialogue ... between reader and text, between self and other, between indigenous traditions and alien life-forms."<sup>71</sup> Within modern Western scholarship, Dallmayr attributes the hermeneutical approach to the contributions of German

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<sup>67</sup> Dallmayr, "Introduction," 421-422. Despite this criticism, a case may be made that the call for dialogical comparison in comparative political theory finds common ground with the calls in the subfield of comparative politics to move away from Western-centric modes of analysis. By drawing attention to indigenous sources of knowledge and the need to develop participatory research designs, a number of contemporary comparativists have critiqued the positivist ontology and epistemology of behaviorist and post-behaviorist approaches to comparative politics and called for a departure from theoretical metanarratives. See: Alpaslan Özerdem and Richard Bowd eds., *Participatory Research Methodologies in Development and Post Disaster/Conflict Reconstruction* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate 2010); J Holland and J Blackburn eds., *Whose Voice? Participatory Research and Policy Change* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1999); Peter Burnham et al., *Research Methods in Politics (Political Analysis)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Dean Carson and Rhonda Koster, "Addressing the problem of Indigenous Disadvantage in Remote Areas of Developed Nations: A Plea for More Comparative Research," *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 7, no. 1 (2012): 110-125.

<sup>68</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory." *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 2 (June 2004): 249.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 250.

philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>72</sup> Drawing on Gadamerian philosophy and building on the work of a number of contemporary scholars including Canadian-Indian political scientist Anthony Parel,<sup>73</sup> Korean-American political scientist Hwa Yol Jung,<sup>74</sup> and British-Indian political theorist Bhikhu Parekh,<sup>75</sup> Dallmayr's own work has sought to identify dialogical possibilities and areas of similarities and equivalences in Western, East Asian, Indian, and Muslim traditions.<sup>76</sup>

Comparative political theory, as defined by Dallmayr and others, entails not only a methodological commitment to the hermeneutical/dialogical understanding of cross-cultural encounters, but also a political/practical commitment to challenging and critiquing all relations of domination and subordination that undermine cosmopolitan visions of the world. It may, thus, be argued that comparative political theory is an effort to negotiate a third way between the normative poles of universalism and parochialism.<sup>77</sup> As noted by political scientist Roxanne Euben, comparative political theory's logic of dialogical comparison works on the assumption that "disparate cultures are not worlds apart, morally and cognitively incommensurable, but exist in conversation

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<sup>72</sup> Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue," 250.

<sup>73</sup> See: Anthony J. Parel and Ronald C. Keith ed., *Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree* (Lanham, MD.: Lexington, 1992).

<sup>74</sup> See: Hwa Yol Jung ed., *Comparative Political Culture in the Age of Globalization: An Introductory Anthology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> See: Bhikhu C. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (UK: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>76</sup> Dallmayr's work will be discussed in greater detail throughout this dissertation, and particularly in Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>77</sup> See: Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue," 254.

with one another, even if they have serious moral and political disagreements."<sup>78</sup> This assumption, according to Euben, does not automatically suggest that political questions and debates are essentially universal dilemmas that surface in all human societies uniformly irrespective of really-existing material and cultural differences. Instead, the assumption is reflective of a certain feature of the modern world, namely the globalization of Western/colonial modernity and many of its socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and sociocultural aspects. Euben argues that the exercise of comparative political theory begins with the acknowledgement that colonialism and globalization have brought diverse cultures and peoples into unprecedented proximity, while also producing highly asymmetrical global power relations. In this context, dialogical comparison challenges the condition of hegemony and Western-centrism and seeks to give recognition to the "possibility that there is humanly significant knowledge outside the confines of the Western canon."<sup>79</sup> It does so, however, not by appealing to universal truth claims, but rather by "emphasizing shared dilemmas and questions."<sup>80</sup>

An example of such an effort can be seen in Euben's 1999 book, entitled *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory*, in which she critically examines the rise of radical Islamist discourses, and particularly that of Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb. On the one hand, Euben's analysis shows that Qutb challenges not only the reality of Western imperialism in Muslim societies, but

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<sup>78</sup> Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, 10. Also see: Roxanne L. Euben, "Contingent Borders, Syncretic Perspectives: Globalization, Political Theory, and Islamizing Knowledge," *International Studies Review* 4, no. 1 (2002), 26.

<sup>79</sup> Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

also the very epistemological foundations of the Western discourse of modernity. On the other hand, however, by drawing attention to alternative Islamic responses to modernity (particularly those articulated by Muslim modernists) Euben shows the futility of the oppositional binary between Islamic and Western thought. Moreover, by highlighting similarities between Qutb's Islamic discourse and the discourses of a range of Western communitarian thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Robert Bellah, Euben makes a case that "Qutb's anxieties about the costs of modern rationalism" find equivalences with certain "Western critiques of modernity."<sup>81</sup>

In examining neo-Shariati readings of Shariati's thought in post-revolutionary Iran and interpreting its significance for the ongoing debates about the relationship between Islam and modernity I have drawn on both normative and methodological insights of comparative political theory. Though the research questions are designed to highlight the particular condition of the negotiation of modernity in Iran and other contemporary Muslim societies, they are also informed by the assumption that the globalization of Europe's colonial modernity since the fifteenth century has brought dispersed human societies into close proximity and made possible the opening up of new dialogical sites for rethinking not only coloniality and modernity, but also cosmopolitanism and active global solidarity. Moreover, by applying a hermeneutical approach and drawing on the method of dialogical comparison this dissertation makes a conscious effort to avoid the problematic exercise of assessing the content and the normative claims

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<sup>81</sup> Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, 11.

of Shariati/neo-Shariati thought against an established (Western) canonical yardstick.<sup>82</sup>

Given the attention to border crossings and the negotiation between local-global and self-other in Shariati/neo-Shariati thought the hermeneutical method of dialogical comparison seems particularly appropriate for the purpose of this dissertation. The dissertation places the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity in conversation with some of the other responses to modernity in Islamic thought, post-colonial thought, and contemporary Western normative thought along the axis of four major themes, namely the genealogy of modernity, the Islam-modernity binary, colonial legacy and Eurocentrism, and identity and identitarianism. What is revealed in these conversations is not only the deficiency of the Eurocentric metanarratives of modernity for analyzing the complex and multifaceted processes of sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic change in both Western and non-Western contexts (i.e. the

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<sup>82</sup> As the following chapters point out, in assessing Shariati's intellectual contributions some academic critics have opted to read his thought using theoretical frameworks in the Western canon of social and political thought. In *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (2011), for example, Ali Mirsepassi draws on the tradition of American pragmatism to critique what he sees at a Heideggerian-inspired rejection of modernity and Enlightenment by Shariati and various other twentieth century Iranian thinkers. Another example is found in the work of Farzin Vahdat who utilizes the analytical framework of German critical theory (primarily as articulated by Jürgen Habermas) to examine the encounter with modernity and its Enlightenment philosophy in the discourses of Shariati and other leading nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim thinkers. While both Mirsepassi and Vahdat set out to identify alternative frameworks to conventional Western analysis for examining the negotiation between Islam and modernity in contemporary Muslim societies, their Western-centric points of reference ultimately reproduce the basic assumptions and conclusions of the very discourses that they set out to critique. To explore some of the inadequacies of Western-centric analytical frameworks for assessing the Islam-modernity nexus in Shariati's thought, Chapter Four focuses on Vahdat's Hegelian/Habermasian reading of Shariati's Islamic discourse. As the chapter shows, while Vahdat credits Shariati with introducing a generation of Iranians to modernity and modern social and political agency, his Hegelian/Habermasian view of a modern epistemic sacred-secular divide leads him to conclude that Shariati's religiously mediated account of modern agency ultimately stands in opposition with the modern notions of individual subjectivity, rights, and freedoms.

inadequacy of the meta-narrative of secularization for understanding the rise of religion in the modern world), but also the existence of many similarities and equivalences between the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse and other regional and global responses to modernity. In Chapter Two for example, I reject the juxtaposition of Shariati's thought with the discourse of Islamic reformism by highlighting Shariati's contribution to the rise of Islamic reform thought and pointing to overlaps between his intellectual project and those of contemporary Muslim reformers including Mohammed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Fethullah Gülen, and Abdolkarim Soroush. Similarly, in comparing and contrasting the Shariati/neo-Shariati critique of the philosophical foundations of Enlightenment modernity with some of the Western critiques of Enlightenment thought, Chapter Four draws attention to some of the ways in which the Shariati/neo-Shariati view about the capacities of emancipatory Islamic thought for negotiating an alternative ontology to that of Enlightenment rationality finds common ground with the views of Cornel West about the anti-domination ontology of prophetic Christianity and those of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno about the progressive inspirational capacities of the Jewish tradition. In these and other discussions, the dissertation seeks to identify the particularities of the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse without assuming the irreconcilability of difference and the impossibility of "mutual" understanding and "shared meaning" and to find its common ground with other local and global emancipatory discourses without taking the stance of a "universal spectator" possessing a "global yardstick."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Dallmayr, "Introduction," 421-422.

## *CHAPTERS SUMMARIES*

Chapter One, entitled "Post-Revolution Readings of a Revolutionary Islamic Discourse," surveys some of the major English and Farsi language academic literature on Ali Shariati's thought and legacy. The chapter shows that even though most commentators see Shariati as the advocate of a radical Islamic discourse, stark disagreements persist about the precise content of his revolutionary discourse and the nature of his engagement with Islam. The chapter also distinguishes between two different readings of Shariati's thought in relation to the debates on the Islam-modernity nexus. It argues that while critics often see his radical religious discourse as a turn away from modernity and a nativist call for the recovery of traditional Islamic authenticity, Shariati's contemporary followers see his intellectual project as an effort to negotiate a contextually grounded discourse of modernity and as a third way between authoritarian modernism and conservative traditionalism. The chapter argues that in its neo-Shariati reading, Shariati's thought is seen as an unfinished project of indigenous modernity aimed at advancing a bottom-up cultural, intellectual, and sociopolitical transformation of Iranian society and as a third way between the dichotomous discourses of modernism and traditionalism.

To identify an analytical framework for examining the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity, Chapter Two provides an overview of some of the major debates about the content, condition, and negotiation of modernity in contemporary Islamic thought. The chapter, entitled "Negotiating Modernity in Modern Islamic Thought," begins with a discussion about the



encounter with modernity in Muslim societies in the context of the nineteenth century expansion of European colonialism. Examining the ideas of some of the leading figures of Islamic modernism, Islamism, and reformism, the chapter highlights an ongoing effort by Muslim thinkers since the late nineteenth century to develop indigenous discourses of modern social and political change. The chapter argues that the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity finds common ground with the discourses of a range of contemporary Muslim thinkers who have contributed to the negotiation of contextually grounded visions of social and political change in Muslim societies. The chapter also points out that the egalitarian interpretation of Islamic doctrines and the simultaneous attention to both ontological and social capacities of public religion in the discourses of Shariati and neo-Shariatis distinguishes them from other emerging Islamic discourses of indigenous modernity and development.

Chapter Three, titled "Public Religion and Sociopolitical Development from Below," further examines some of the ways in which Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought by neo-Shariatis differ from other discourses of indigenous modernity in contemporary Islamic thought. The chapter focuses on the development of an egalitarian and democratic post-colonial discourse of indigenous modernity by Shariati and neo-Shariatis, which seeks to utilize both ontological/inspirational and social/mobilizational capacities of public religion. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks of public religion and multiple modernities to examine the relationship between religion and the modern processes of social and political change, the chapter identifies Shariati as one of

the pioneers of a paradigm shift in Muslim societies toward the recognition of the role of public religion in facilitating social and political development. The chapter then examines neo-Shariatis' effort to advance Shariati's unfinished project by highlighting his spiritual, humanist, and egalitarian interpretation of Islamic thought and emphasizing the role of intellectuals as agents of cultural/intellectual change within civil society.

Chapter Four, entitled "The Enlightenment Subject and the 'Islamic Discourse' of Ali Shariati," examines the philosophical foundations of the Shariati/neo-Shariati theory of indigenous modernity and its religious/spiritual ontology. The chapter begins with a critical assessment of some of the philosophical critiques of Shariati's religious thought by his secular critics. In particular, I focus on the views of Iranian sociologist Farzin Vahdat, who in a number of works over the last decade has described Shariati's religious/monotheistic ontology as a negation of the modern notion of individual subjectivity. After a critical assessment of Vahdat's philosophical critique and its Hegelian/Habermasian normative assumptions, the chapter turns to the new philosophical readings of Shariati's thought by his contemporary intellectual followers. A case is made that contrary to the views of Vahdat and other critics, in both pre- and post-revolutionary Iran Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought have contributed to the negotiation of a contextually grounded account of the autonomous modern subject and the rights-bearing individual. I argue that Shariati's critical engagement with the philosophical foundations of Enlightenment modernity is informed to a large extent by his views about the

crisis of the modern subject in Western modernity and his attempt to redefine the relationship between the modern self and its others through a religiously mediate account of subjectivity.

The final chapter, titled "Indigenous Modernity: Beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism?" asks if the critique of Western/Enlightenment modernity and the advocacy of an indigenous modernity in the discourses of Shariati and neo-Shariatis amounts to an anti-Western stance or to a discourse of Orientalism in reverse. Rejecting the reading of Shariati's thought as a discourse of Occidentalism, Chapter Five makes a case that for Shariati and his intellectual followers the project of indigenous modernity is in fact a radical move toward a post-colonial discourse of cosmopolitanism. It argues that the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity can be located within a broader effort by a range of post-colonial thinkers to radically challenge and negotiate an alternative to the clashing forces of hegemonic universalism and essentialist particularism and the dichotomous discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism.

## CHAPTER ONE

### POST-REVOLUTION READINGS OF A REVOLUTIONARY ISLAMIC DISCOURSE

#### Introduction

Although most commentators agree that Ali Shariati was among the leading advocates of a revolutionary Islamic discourse in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s, there is little agreement about the precise content of his intellectual project in pre-revolution Iran and his legacy and influence in the post-revolutionary context. The literature on Shariati's thought and legacy seems to be permanently shaped by a series of unending debates. Was Shariati's construction of a radical Islamic discourse an ideological project designed to mobilize the masses into a revolutionary uprising with the ultimate objective of overthrowing the Pahlavi regime, or was it an unfinished project of indigenous modernity which the 1979 revolution interrupted abruptly and temporarily? Was it a quest for authenticity and particularity, or a search for hybridity and universality? Was it a vanguardist call for the revolutionary and political leadership of committed Muslim intellectuals, or a call upon all intellectuals to fulfil a prophetic mission of advocating on behalf of the marginalized masses and empowering them through raising change-oriented consciousness? Did Shariati's Islamic ideology represent an instrumentalist approach toward religion, or did he see religion as something more than simply a tool for popular mobilization? And finally, is Shariati's legacy

realized and continued in the prevailing discourses and institutions of the Islamic Republic, or does his radical Islam pose a challenge to the clerical establishment and the country's post-revolution rulers?

In a very broad sense, we may be able to distinguish between two readings of Shariati's thought within the (English and Farsi language) academic literature. The first reading sees his discourse as a revolutionary ideology which played a major role in the mass mobilization against the Pahlavi dynasty in the early 1970s, and which effectively came to an end with Shariati's death in 1977 and the overthrow of the Shah in 1979. In this reading, Shariati's thought is often analyzed in reference to the revolutionary movement and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Even though some variations of this reading suggest that Shariati's ideas are embodied in some of the discourses and institutions of the Islamic Republic, they nevertheless hold that Shariati's revolutionary discourse no longer corresponds to the contemporary realities of a post-revolutionary Iranian society. While the second reading acknowledges the revolutionary character of Shariati's thought and his influential role in the revolutionary uprising, it nevertheless distinguishes Shariati's Islamic discourse from the Islamist discourses that rose to ascendancy in the course of the revolution and after the establishment of the Islamic state. Advanced by a number of contemporary Iranian and non-Iranian scholars as well by a range of Shariati's intellectual followers in post-revolutionary Iran, this reading draws attention to Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity, which, it is argued, he sought to advance primarily on the basis of a radical restructuring of traditional religious and cultural resources. In

this view, Shariati's intellectual discourse represents not a failed or finished project, but instead a sustainable project of socio-cultural and socio-political development that remains relevant today in contemporary Iranian society.

## **A Revolutionary Islamic Ideology**

### *SHARIATI AS THE IDEOLOGUE OF THE 1979 REVOLUTION*

In the three and half decades since the Iranian revolution, Shariati has been described by many academic commentators as the ideological leader and architect of the revolutionary uprising.<sup>1</sup> For British-American scholar, Hamid Algar, who has translated some of Shariati's works from Farsi to English, Shariati was "the major ideologue" of the 1979 revolutionary movement.<sup>2</sup> In *The Roots of the Islamic Revolution* (1988), Algar argues that while the revolution was generally led by the Shi'i Ulama, it was "largely the work of Dr Shariati that ... prepared a large number of the younger educated class in Iran to accept and follow with devotion and courage the leadership given by Ayatollah Khomeini."<sup>3</sup> In Algar's view, even though he died before the revolution, Shariati's role in the 1979

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<sup>1</sup> See: Andrew Burgess, "Forward: On Drawing a Line," in Ali Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1993), 5-9; William E. Griffith, "The Revival of Islamic Fundamentalism: The Case of Iran," *International Security* 4, no. 1 (Summer, 1979): 132-138; Mohammed Ayoob, "The Revolutionary Thrust of Islamic Political Tradition," *Third World Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1981): 269-276; Val Moghadam, "Socialism or Anti-Imperialism? The Left and Revolution in Iran," *New Left Review* I, no. 166 (November-December 1987): 5-28; Michiel Leezenberg, "Power and Political Spirituality: Michel Foucault on the Islamic Revolution in Iran," in *Cultural History After Foucault*, ed. John Neubauer (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1999), 64-73; Fred Halliday, "The Iranian Revolution," *Political Studies*, xxx, no. 3 (September 1982): 437-444.

<sup>2</sup> Hamid Algar, *The Roots of the Islamic Revolution*, Islamic Foundation Press, 1988, 49, <http://www.islamminmalayalam.com/books/q.%20The%20Roots%20of%20the%20Islamic%20Revolution%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed on January 12, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

uprising was "second only to Ayatollah Khomeini himself."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Tanzanian-American scholar of religious studies, Abdulaziz Sachedina, who was a student of Shariati at Ferdowsi University in Mashhad during the late 1960s, believes that Shariati saw Islam as "a socially and politically committing ideology" that could serve a modern project of revolutionary mass mobilization and radical social and political change.<sup>5</sup> According to Sachedina, in a social context shaped on the one hand by the hegemony of top-down "Westernization" policies of the state, and on the other hand by the inability of traditional religious and secular elites to present an alternative social and political program, Shariati's construction of Islam into a modern ideology led to "the Islamic revival among Iranian youth" and the regeneration of "the revolutionary and reformatory aspects of early Islam."<sup>6</sup>

Another account of Shariati's revolutionary ideology is offered by Iranian-American historian Ervand Abrahamian. In "Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution" (1982), Abrahamian argues that Shariati's revolutionary discourse was a synthesis of "modern socialism," "traditional Shi'ism," and Fanonian Third Worldism.<sup>7</sup> In *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (1989), Abrahamian returns to Shariati's revolutionary Islamic ideology and examines some of the normative foundations of his worldview (*Weltanschauung*).<sup>8</sup> According to Abrahamian,

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<sup>4</sup> Algar, *The Roots of the Islamic Revolution*, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford U Press, 1983), 192.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>7</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, "Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports*, no. 102, *Islam and Politics* (January 1982), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 111.

Shariati saw history as an evolutionary process of human development, which he articulated in such terms as "historical determinism," "dialectical movement," or "historical dialectic." The driving force behind this dialectical movement was "God's will," an innate human desire "to reach a higher stage of consciousness," and "class struggle" between the oppressors (exploiter) and the oppressed (exploited). Abrahamian notes that in *Religion versus Religion* and elsewhere, Shariati argues that out of the historical conflict between the two classes two clashing religions have emerged: "that of the rulers sanctifying oppression, illegitimate power, and the status quo; and that of the ruled articulating a true sense of right and wrong, of good and evil, and of justice and injustice." For Shariati, Abrahamian contends, history was ultimately shaped by the battle between the religion of oppression and the religion of liberation. Shariati, it is argued, believed that while the initial and the true message of Islam was one of "permanent revolution" toward the realization of "social justice, human brotherhood, and eventually a classless society," the post-Muhammad Caliphate "created a new imperial ruling class and ... transformed the religion of liberation into one of oppression." Thus Shi'ism, as the path of the prophet's rightful heirs, rose the "banner of revolt and [showed] the world that the caliphs had betrayed the revolutionary message of Islam."<sup>9</sup> Yet, Shi'ism too had been "expropriated" and "institutionalized" by the official clerical class. Accordingly, it was now up to the true intellectuals to raise the banner of revolt, thus, "raising 'public

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<sup>9</sup> Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, 111-112.



consciousness', injecting dynamic thinking into people's awareness, and hastening the 'dialectical process': in short, leading the way towards the revolution."<sup>10</sup>

Iranian-American scholar, Hamid Dabashi, also examines Shariati's Islamic revolutionary ideology in his 1992 book, entitled, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, as well as in a number of subsequent works.<sup>11</sup> Like many others, Dabashi regards Shariati as one of the leading advocates of a radical Islamic ideology, who "energized the Iranian political culture ... beyond anything known in its modern history."<sup>12</sup> According to him, Shariati's political project was one of constructing a revolutionary ideology aimed at initiating a "massive ideological reconstitution of the status quo," and one that would lead to a "tangible social transformation of private pieties into public virtues."<sup>13</sup> In his reading of the Islamic language and content of Shariati's revolutionary thought, Dabashi identifies what he regards as a dilemma that Shariati, as a Muslim revolutionary who believed in "the necessity of ideological convictions to augment, or advance, the 'material conditions' of any revolution," had to overcome.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, Shariati "witnessed the failure of radical 'Western' ideologies, transplanted from their native soil, attempting to take root in the political consciousness of the masses." On the other hand, however, Shariati aimed "to mobilize the masses for political ends that the very secular ideology had

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<sup>10</sup> Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> See: Hamid Dabashi, "Ali Shariati's Islam: Revolutionary Uses of Faith in a Post-Traditional Society," *Islamic Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (fourth quarter, 1983): 203–22; Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1993), 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

articulated."<sup>15</sup> Faced with this dilemma, Dabashi argues, "Shariati sought to achieve his revolutionary ends through the same ancient traditions that other secular ideologies considered as the opium of the masses."<sup>16</sup> Shariati, Dabashi contends, aimed to rewrite "the entire Islamic history in a utopian language that would convince his young constituency of the political viability of his version of Shi'ite Islam," a project that, according to Dabashi, included reinterpreting "Marxist utopian motifs based on specifically Shi'ite terms."<sup>17</sup>

A more detailed analysis of Shariati's revolutionary thought is developed by his political biographer, Ali Rahnama. According to Rahnama, though a synthesis of many contradictory currents, Shariati's revolutionary thought is ultimately an egalitarian ideology based on a spiritual ontology. He argues that Shariati's "ideal society is founded on a socialist economic system governed by ethical and spiritual values firmly based on the Islamic belief in God."<sup>18</sup> In *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (2000), as well as in an essay titled "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel" (2005), Rahnama examines the various phases of the development of Shariati's Islamic revolutionary thought, its ontological grounds, and its negotiation with other revolutionary discourses of his time. The first phase, according to Rahnama, in the formation and evolution of Shariati's revolutionary thought begins with his early enchantment with the character of Abu Zar (Abu Dharr al-Ghifari) (d. 652), an early convert to Islam known for his strict piety and opposition to corruption in the post-Muhammad

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<sup>15</sup> Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 110.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>18</sup> Ali Rahnama, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnama (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 242.

institution of the Caliphate during the rule of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (577-656). Shariati considered Abu Zar to be the first Islamic socialist, and even referred to him as "the forefather of all post French Revolution egalitarian schools."<sup>19</sup> Shariati's Abu Zar, argues Rahnema, is a "symbolic creation" representing "the signal, code or allegory for the committed, defiant, revolutionary Muslim who preaches equality, fraternity, justice and liberation."<sup>20</sup> This early phase, we are told, is also marked in the early 1950s by Shariati's orientation towards the Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists, an organization which was founded in Iran in 1943 and which "blended Islam with socialism and maintained that Islam's socio-economic system was that of scientific socialism based on monotheism."<sup>21</sup>

The second phase begins in the early 1960s during Shariati's time in Paris when in the course of his activism in support of the Algerian independence movement he became familiar with and came to be inspired by the strategy of armed struggle employed by the National Liberation Front and its military wing. The success of their strategy convinced Shariati "of the necessity of military action by a small group of highly dedicated, well-trained, professional, organizationally independent and clandestine revolutionaries."<sup>22</sup> This was a short-lived phase in Shariati's revolutionary thought. The third phase begins in the mid-1960s. Specifically, upon his return from Europe Shariati came to believe that "the subjective revolutionary conditions did not exist in Iran," and began to consider popular education in an Islamic ideology "as the key pre-requisite to a

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<sup>19</sup> Rahnema, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel," 213.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 214-5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 223.

liberating revolution."<sup>23</sup> It was in this period that Shariati began "a life of total dedication to the cause of articulating, formulating and propagating a radical Islamic ideology which he hoped would lead to a radical Islamic political movement among the Iranian youth."<sup>24</sup> Emphasizing the necessity of bridging the gap between intellectuals and the predominantly religious masses, Shariati "set out to show that irrespective of their faith in religion, militant intellectuals who sought social and political change in Iran were obliged to learn their religious heritage and speak its language."<sup>25</sup>

The fourth phase in the evolution of Shariati's revolutionary thought begins in October 1971, when Shariati became a regular lecturer at the Hosseinieh Ershad in Tehran.<sup>26</sup> Shariati's Ershad phase began shortly after the February 1971 Siahkal uprising, an unsuccessful guerrilla operation in northern Iran by the leftist group, the Iranian People's Fadaee Guerrillas (*cherik-hayeh fadaeyeh khalgheh iran*). Seeing the increasing influence of Marxist ideas on young Iranians, Shariati sought "to formulate a coherent radical and revolutionary Islamic doctrine," to compete with other well-established ideologies, particularly revolutionary Marxism.<sup>27</sup> By the summer of 1971, the Organization of the People's Mojahedin of Iran (*sazman-e mojahedin khalgh-e iran*), an Islamic-Marxist opposition group,

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<sup>23</sup> Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 194.

<sup>24</sup> Rahnama, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel," 225.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>26</sup> Hosseinieh Ershad was founded in Tehran in the mid-1960s as a religious institute dedicated to the propagation of Islamic thought. The facility, which includes a large lecture hall and a public library, quickly became a popular hub for many young Muslims who attended public lectures and courses taught by Shariati and a number of other prominent anti-Shah religious figures. Hosseinieh Ershad was shut down by the government in the early 1970s and re-opened again after the revolution.

<sup>27</sup> Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, 287.

was also engaged in armed struggle. Hosseinieh Ershad and Shariati's lectures became a recruiting ground for these new guerrilla groups, particularly the Mojahedin. Pointing to the dynamism between Shariati's teachings and the highly volatile political environment in Iran, Rahnema writes: "While [Shariati's] fiery speeches aroused the high school and university students and mentally prepared them for engaging in armed struggle, the daring and selfless revolutionary acts of this same youth moved and impressed him, further radicalizing his message."<sup>28</sup> During this phase, building on his previous works on the necessity of developing a contextually grounded ideology, Shariati developed a theory of Shi'ism as a revolutionary ideology. According to Rahnema, in Shariati's view Shi'i Islam was "the most deeply-felt common denominator" in Iranian society and "the nervous system of the Iranian body politic." Shariati, Rahnema argues, also believed that the Shi'i faith contained in it inspirational capacities that "would mobilize the entire population and thus bring about a socio-political transformation."<sup>29</sup> This phase ends with the closure of Hosseinieh Ershad in November 1972 and Shariati's eventual imprisonment.

The final phase of Shariati's life, according to Rahnema, "is characterized by a return to revolutionary intellectual rhetoric, recommending theoretical and ideological engagement rather than armed revolutionary struggle."<sup>30</sup> During the twenty five months between his release from prison in March 1975 and his death in Southampton England in June 1977 Shariati began to place greater emphasis on

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<sup>28</sup> Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 280.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

the need to attend to spirituality and came to believe that "revolutionary Puritanism [*khodsazi-ye engelabi*], essentially based on gnosticism [*sic*] was a pre-requisite to social transformation."<sup>31</sup> In his final analysis, Rahnema assesses Shariati's revolutionary Islamic discourse as a utopian vision of a revolution without a clear strategy and objectives. In the conclusion of his political biography of Shariati, Rahnema writes: "Shariati was a romantic and not a practitioner of revolutions. A firm believer in platonic relations, he did not, perhaps, want to lose the immaculate vision that he held of the revolution. The utopian idea was too good to be put to test."<sup>32</sup>

Among the more recent contributions, Iranian-American political scientist Shireen Hunter examines Shariati's revolutionary Islamic ideology in her 2008 book entitled *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*. According to Hunter, Shariati regarded ideology to be "essential for human life at both the individual and the collective levels."<sup>33</sup> She argues that Shariati was, first and foremost, "a leftist intellectual who believed in revolutionary action and assigned an important role for a revolutionary vanguard in creating the new society after having dismissed the old system." Nevertheless, she asserts that Islam constituted "the cornerstone of [Shariati's] ideology and worldview (*jahan bini*)."<sup>34</sup> According to Hunter, the Islamic character of Shariati's revolutionary ideology was, in part, informed by his religious family background and religious

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<sup>31</sup> Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 361.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>33</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, "Islamic Reformist Discourses in Iran: Proponents and Prospects," in *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2008), 52.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

beliefs, and, in part, by his "authenticist tendencies, which had been sharpened by his becoming acquainted with similar ideas developed by Third World intellectuals, most notably Franz Fanon."<sup>35</sup> Hunter argues that Shariati regarded the true Islam of Muhammad as a "revolutionary movement and ideology," whose objective was "to destroy the existing system and replace it with one based on justice."<sup>36</sup> Islam, in Shariati's view, was "an ideology, whose goal is humankind's salvation."<sup>37</sup> In assessing Shariati's influence on the 1978-79 revolutionary uprising, Hunter concludes that Shariati's Islamic ideology "won large numbers of Iranian youth to the idea of Islamic Revolution," and quotes Iranian intellectual, Ehsan Naraghi, that "[Shariati] made people fall in love with revolution."<sup>38</sup>

#### *IDEOLOGIZATION OF RELIGION*

In addition to the academic assessments of Shariati's revolutionary ideology, a particular account of his radical Islamic discourse has been advanced in post-revolutionary Iran by a number of prominent Iranian intellectuals who critique Shariati for what they consider to be his project of ideologization of religion. Defining ideology as a closed and dogmatic system of action-oriented thought that cultivates blind imitation, these critics have argued that as the leading ideologue of the Iranian revolution Shariati paved the way for the post-revolutionary ideological revival and reappropriation of the Islamic tradition, thus delaying the negotiation of modernity and modern social and political norms and

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<sup>35</sup> Hunter, "Islamic Reformist Discourses," 55.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 56.

institutions in Iranian society.<sup>39</sup> The charge of ideologization of religion is levelled not only by secular intellectuals such as Dariush Shayegan and Javad Tabatabaei, but also by an intellectual current which has come to be known in recent decades as "religious intellectualism" (*roshanfekri-ye dini*).<sup>40</sup> Many leading figures of this current, including philosopher and religious reformer Abdolkarim Soroush, were themselves among the young Muslim students who attended Shariati's lectures at the Hosseinieh Ershad in the late 1960s and the early 1970s and were influenced by his teachings and ideas.

Soroush distinguishes between Shariati's project and the projects of post-revolution religious intellectuals by arguing that whereas the former sought to develop a synthesis of "Islam and revolution," the latter's aim has been to reconcile "Islam and democracy." Thus, he argues, while Shariati's revolutionary interpretation of Islam was a force of deconstruction at the service of bringing down the Pahlavi regime, the democratic interpretation of religion by contemporary religious intellectuals aims to serve the construction and

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<sup>39</sup> Seyyed Javad Tabatabaei, "maktab-e tabriz va mabani-e tajaddod-khahi" ("The Tabriz School of Thought and the Foundations of Modernism," <http://www.javadtatababai.org/search/label/978-600-5003-06-2> (accessed on January 20, 2012); Dariush Shayegan, "Aayin hendoo va erfān eslami" ("Hindu Tradition and Islamic Mysticism"), interview with Aliasghar Seyed Abadi, *Baztab-e Andisheh*, no. 77 (Shahrivar 1385/September 2006), <http://www.noormags.com/view/fa/articlepage/110528> (accessed February 8, 2012). Also see: Seyyed Javad Tabatabaei, *Ibn-e Khaldun va oloom ejtemaei (Ibn Khaldun and Social Sciences)*, (Tehran: Tarh-e No, 1374/1994); Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Zir asmanhay-e jahan: goftegooye Dariush Shayegan ba Ramin Jahanbegloo (Under the World's Skies: Dariush Shayegan in Conversation with Ramin Jahanbegloo)* (Tehran: Farzan Rooz, 1387/2008), 29, 83.

<sup>40</sup> See: Abdolkarim Soroush, *Farbeh tar az ideology (Sturdier than Ideology)*, (Tehran: Serat, 1375/1996); Saeed Hajarian, "Shariati mojadad bood va na motajaded" ("Shariati was a Revivalist not a Modernizer"), *Nasim-e Bidary*, no. 7 (Khordad 1389/June 2010), <http://drshariati.org/show.asp?id=210> (accessed 4 March 2012); Soroush Dabbagh, "Tarikh-e gharaa-at-e ideologik az din tamaam shodeh ast" ("The History of Ideological Readings of Religion Has Reached its End"), *Nasim-e Bidary*, no. 7 (Khordad 1389/June 2010), <http://soroushdabbagh.com/home/pdf/58.pdf> (accessed 4 March 2012).



management of a post-revolutionary society.<sup>41</sup> Examining the social and political context in which Shariati initiated and embarked upon his revolutionary project, Soroush argues that Shariati lived in the age of ideologies and was thus convinced that to revolt against the dominant forces his predominantly religious society needed to have a unifying and action-oriented ideological discourse. Shariati's most important achievement, according to Soroush, was to turn Islam and its traditional doctrines into a modern ideology.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Soroush argues that in the aftermath of the revolution, Shariati's ideological project proved to be an effective weapon in the hands of the Islamic Republic. According to him, "the terminology and concepts that Shariati extracted from ancient religious texts and teachings are today among the key concepts and terms in the language with which the Islamic Republic speaks."<sup>43</sup>

Soroush also sees the rise of an official (clerical) class of the interpreters of revolutionary ideology and the emergence of national unity on the basis of common hatred for a perceived enemy as some of the negative consequences of Shariati's ideologization of religion. He, nevertheless, argues that these negative consequences were the unintended effects of Shariati's project. Thus, Soroush contends, "ideas always find a life of their own, independent from the intentions of their authors. What an intellectual knows, understands, and intends is not necessarily the same as the way in which those ideas are perceived or utilized."<sup>44</sup> The negative consequences of ideologization of religion, then, are "unfortunate

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<sup>41</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush, *Az Shariati (On Shariati)* (Tehran: Serat, 1384/2006), 1.

<sup>42</sup> Soroush, *Az Shariati*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

fruits" that have grown on the tree of Shariati's ideas, even though they may be unrecognizable to the author himself.<sup>45</sup>

#### *ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY AS A DISCOURSE OF AUTHENTICITY*

Since the second decade of the Iranian revolution, Shariati's Islamic ideology has been described in some of the academic literature as a discourse of authenticity that calls for a turn away from modernity and the Western other, and a return to an authentic Iranian-Islamic self. In *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (1996), Iranian-American political scientist Mehrzad Boroujerdi argues that the ultimate objective of Shariati's ideological discourse was to reconstruct the authentic existence of his Islamic and Oriental society by juxtaposing the latter against a monolithic entity called the West or the Occident. According to Boroujerdi, in developing his particular ideological account Shariati ignored and even misrepresented historical facts in order to portray Islam and Islamic identity as something "unique." He argues that in Shariati's thought the Islamic Orient and the Christian Occident are presented as archetypically different entities with distinct ontologies and epistemologies. Boroujerdi believes that Shariati sees these differences primarily as a product of religious difference. Shariati, he contends, saw Christianity as a passive and apolitical religion and Islam as a revolutionary and emancipatory faith.<sup>46</sup> In Boroujerdi's view, Shariati himself was fully aware of the fraudulency of such a dichotomy. He argues that Shariati had been exposed to the ideas of Christian

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<sup>45</sup> Soroush, *Az Shariati*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 109.

liberation theology during his time in Paris, and "knew all too well that his dichotomy between Christian passivity and Islamic militancy was fraudulent."<sup>47</sup> Boroujerdi further argues that despite his nativist position toward modernity and the West, Shariati's Islamic discourse drew heavily on modern Western thought.<sup>48</sup> Boroujerdi attributes this perceived inconsistency between Shariati's quest for Islamic authenticity and his reliance on various non-Islamic sources of knowledge to Shariati's dishonesty and his ahistorical engagement with both Islam and Christianity.<sup>49</sup>

In his reading of Shariati's thesis of "return to the self" (*bazgasht beh khishtan*), Boroujerdi argues that the thesis was "a replica of Fanon's discourse of 'return of the oppressed' but with a peculiarly Iranian twist." According to him, whereas Fanon stressed "the racial, historical, and linguistic features of Third World struggles," Shariati put emphasis on "Islamic roots."<sup>50</sup> Rejecting the view that "return" implies a turning back "to the mythic past of early Islam," Boroujerdi maintains that Shariati's call for return "was more a discourse of 're-turning' the present rather than 'returning' to the past."<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, he argues that though the discourse of return appeared to be a "quest for authenticity" by a Third World intellectual disillusioned by the West, it was in reality rooted in and inspired by the Western ideas and frames of reference.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, 109.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 110-113.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 113 -114.

Iranian-American sociologist Ali Mirsepassi is another commentator who regards Shariati's revolutionary Islamic discourse as a discourse of authenticity.<sup>53</sup> According to Mirsepassi, Shariati's reconfiguration of modernity and his account of "a local Islamic modernity" were ultimately aimed at reconciling "the experience of modernization with Iranian traditional life."<sup>54</sup> He, nevertheless, remains sceptical about the nature of Shariati's particular reconciliation of tradition and modernity. According to him, while Enlightenment modernity and its philosophical foundations present a set of "universal and normative standards of human behavior and ethics based on a rational, democratic, and humanist model of society,"<sup>55</sup> Shariati's "alternative modernity" departed from modernity's "cosmopolitan humanist position."<sup>56</sup> Pointing to a tension between Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment currents in (Western) modernity, Mirsepassi argues that while Shariati's thought cannot be described as anti-modern, it nevertheless challenged a notion of universalism advanced by Enlightenment modernity.<sup>57</sup> For Mirsepassi, in Shariati's authenticist discourse, "In place of a universal and secular truth is an equally modern championing and politicization of the truth in cultural tradition, or a defense of a single overarching sociocultural meaning as both an ontology and a mode of political organization."<sup>58</sup> He makes a case that in the context of Iran and other Muslim societies, where democratic institutions are not

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<sup>53</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, "Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006), 417.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>55</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19.

<sup>56</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, "Intellectual Life after the 1979 Revolution: Radical Hope and Nihilistic Dreams," *Radical History Review* 2009, no. 105 (October 2009), 172.

<sup>57</sup> Mirsepassi, "Religious Intellectuals," 416.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

consolidated, the claim to authenticity can have particularly "disastrous" political consequences by advancing a narrative that is "inherently hostile to even the very concept of formal democracy and *pluralism*."<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, in *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (2011), Mirsepassi suggests that in developing his discourse of authenticity Shariati was under the influence of Heidegger's counter-Enlightenment philosophy. Under this influence, Mirsepassi argues, Shariatis rejected "the entire Iranian experience of modernity," and "socioeconomic development" as an "evil and cancerous" force of Westernization and called for an alternative vision of modernity based on a return to "authentic" Islamic roots.<sup>60</sup> Like Heideggerian philosophy, Mirsepassi asserts, Shariati's alternative to modernity sought to revive a lost ontological bond that once connected the individual to community, nature, and metaphysics. Moreover, he argues that much like Heidegger's, Shariati's vision of authenticity was "fraught with the dangers of authoritarianism and cultural particularism."<sup>61</sup>

Like Mirsepassi, Farzin Vahdat, an Iranian sociologist, believes that while Shariati's Islamic discourse was not a total rejection of modernity it was nevertheless constructed as an authentic response to "the cultural aspects of the modern world."<sup>62</sup> Vahdat argues that even though Shariati's discourse challenged

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<sup>59</sup> Mirsepassi, "Religious Intellectuals," 416.

<sup>60</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 33.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>62</sup> Farzin Vahdat, "Religious Modernity in Iran: Dilemmas of Islamic Democracy in the Discourse of Mohammad Khatami," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 3

"certain facets of modernity," it also "wittingly and unwittingly, [engaged] with some of the essential elements of the modern culture."<sup>63</sup> In examining the negotiation between modern and non-modern elements in Shariati's thought Vahdat is particularly interested in Shariati's engagement with modern subjectivity.<sup>64</sup> For Vahdat, whereas modernity is based on the idea of subjectivity, Shariati's Islamic discourse advanced a "contradictory form of subjectivity, which can be designated 'mediated subjectivity'."<sup>65</sup> According to him, Shariati sees the modern subject as a "'lonely wolf', who, after challenging the Being and nature, was now horrified by the solitude of subjectivity." Shariati, he contends, found the solution to this challenge in reviving the ontological bond between the individual and the God of transcendence and in "submission to the Being, in annihilation of the self in God, and in finding a 'new' self, who, in cooperation with God and Love, would create the universe anew in a utopia of mediated subjectivity."<sup>66</sup> In his view, by mediating subjectivity through divine sovereignty and the collective will of human beings, Shariati's thought "simultaneously confirmed and denied human empowerment."<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, Vahdat seems less sceptical than Mirsepassi about Shariati's particular articulation of Islamic modernity, and considers the discourse of mediated subjectivity as a "transitory discourse with a

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(2005), 650. Also see: Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 131-2, 139.

<sup>63</sup> Vahdat, "Religious Modernity in Iran," 650.

<sup>64</sup> Modern or Cartesian subjectivity is based on René Descartes' notion of the rational and autonomous individual.

<sup>65</sup> Vahdat, "Religious Modernity in Iran," 651.

<sup>66</sup> Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 145.

<sup>67</sup> Vahdat, "Religious Modernity in Iran," 652.

possibility of translating itself and society."<sup>68</sup> The full transition, for Vahdat, would depend on the emergence and gradual consolidation of absolute/universal subjectivity.

A different account of Shariati's quest for "authenticity" is developed by Iranian political economist Kamran Matin. Matin argues that "Shariati's political-intellectual project of revolutionary Islam was part of a wider Islamic discourse of 'radical authenticity'."<sup>69</sup> The latter, Matin maintains, emerged in direct and indirect engagement with the European "colonial and imperial projects, ... Western capitalism, and various ideologies associated with it." It is from this perspective that Matin discusses both the Pahlavi regime's top-down modernization and Shariati's Islamic discourse of "radical authenticity." In his view, "despite persistent claims to authenticity, ideational purity, nativism, etc., what the West/non-West encounter actually involved in ideological terms were synthesis, hybridity, and amalgamation."<sup>70</sup> Highlighting the "co-constitutive" nature of the relationship between the discourses of "heterogeneous ... authenticity" and "universal homogeneity," Matin asserts that the claims to authenticity "were indeed strategies for successfully being-in-the-(modern)-world and not exiting from it."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Farzin Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations of Islamic Revolutionary Discourse in Iran: Vacillations on Human Subjectivity," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 14 (1999), 72.

<sup>69</sup> Kamran Matin, "Decoding Political Islam: Uneven and Combined Development and Aī Shariati's Political Thought," in *International Relations and non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (London: Routledge, 2010), 108-9.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

Matin regards Shariati's discourse of "radical authenticity" as a contextually grounded theory of modern social-political transformation along the lines of the Iranian leftist tradition.<sup>72</sup> Examining a national context conditioned by the rise of the urban middle and working classes and their unmet expectations, and an international context shaped by the Cold War and a host of anti-colonial and independence movements, Matin makes a case that Islamic discourses were more effective than secular-leftist ones in communicating with and mobilizing the emerging social classes in Iranian society and placing their "ideological stamp on the revolutionary movement that was already in active gesture."<sup>73</sup> Within this context, it is argued, Shariati's Islamic discourse was particularly successful in identifying and mobilizing "the appropriate *agency*" of the Iranian masses.<sup>74</sup> Matin argues that on the basis of the analysis that modern classes did not exist in Iran "as they had historically developed in the West," Shariati maintained that in order to bring about transformative consciousness a political ideology had to be "capable of engaging and positively provoking the cultural-emotional sensibilities of the principle agency of the revolution, 'the people' and *not* the proletariat or 'national bourgeoisie'."<sup>75</sup> In Matin's reading, by identifying and mobilizing this contextually appropriate agency Shariati's discourse of radical authenticity succeeded in reconstructing "the dominant, but largely conservative and passive, discourses of Shi'ism into a modern popular ideological force marked by an

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<sup>72</sup> Matin, "Decoding Political Islam," 108.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 108-9 (emphasis in original).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 116.



innovative combination of modern revolutionary zeal and a radically reformed sense of Muslimhood." <sup>76</sup>

### **An Unfinished Project of Indigenous Modernity**

While Shariati's critics often read his thought as an ideological project aimed at reviving a traditional Islamic authenticity, a range of other commentators read Shariati's Islamic discourse as an attempt to negotiate a third way between authoritarian modernism and conservative traditionalism. For the former group, Shariati's discourse represents a misguided response to the particular social, political, economic, and cultural context of pre-revolution Iran and one that no longer corresponds to the objective realities of Iranian society in the context of globalization and the universal reign of modernity. The latter group, however, finds Shariati's attention to the contextual determinants of social and political change and his simultaneous critique of modernity and tradition to be a relevant approach for negotiating sustainable and bottom-up cultural and sociopolitical development in post-revolutionary Iran.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Matin, "Decoding Political Islam," 121.

<sup>77</sup> As mentioned earlier, the two categories are far from monolithic groupings and it is possible to categorize the academic literature on Shariati in a number of other ways. Ali Rahnama, Hamid Dabashi, and Kamran Matin, for instance, in their critical assessment of Shariati's revolutionary discourse, point to some of the potentially unfinished and relevant aspects of his thought. In particular, in some of his more recent works, Dabashi has drawn attention to Shariati's unfinished revolutionary project and its potential intellectual capacity in the context of the globalization and decentering of capitalist modernity. Nevertheless, unlike the commentators who are discussed in the present section, these academic critics do not regard Shariati's revolutionary discourse as part of a coherent and systematic social and political theory and project.

For political scientist, Mojtaba Mahdavi, for example, Shariati's intellectual project is aimed at identifying the normative and practical potential "for combining traditional and modern models [of development]" and advancing a methodology based on "modern and substantive change within the structures of the prevailing traditions."<sup>78</sup> In "Two Perspectives on Islamic Radicalism," Mahdavi draws attention to two major themes in Shariati's analysis about the conditions for bottom-up and sustainable change: first, the need for a critical engagement with the past (i.e. religion, traditional culture, etc.) in light of present needs and future objectives; and second, the responsibility of intellectuals to become the agents of change. According to Mahdavi, in Shariati's view, "the future is but a synthesis of the present and the past and any effort to deny the past is utopian and unscientific." It is for this reason, Mahdavi believes, that Shariati calls upon intellectuals to advance the project of a "deep transformation in the prevailing religious thought and a revolution in traditions in order to change their content and preserve their revised forms."<sup>79</sup> In Mahdavi's reading, Shariati's thought essentially "rejects the unilinear trajectories of modernism, the monolithic conceptualization of modernization, and the mechanical dichotomization of tradition and modernity."<sup>80</sup> Shariati, it is argued, regards many modern concepts to be universal values "reflecting the shared experiences of humanity" and having emerged out of a historical process of "restructuring traditional institutions and

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<sup>78</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Radikalism az do didgah: gofteman-e klasik va noradikalism-e Shariati" ("Radicalism from Two Perspectives: The Classical Discourse and Shariati's Neo-Radicalism"), in *Ghoghnoos-e ssian: revaiati digar az andisheh doktor Shariati (The Rebellious Phoenix: Another Account of the Thought of Dr. Shariati)*, ed. Amir Rezaei, (Tehran: Ghasidehsara, 2002), 248.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 248.

norms." Thus, for Mahdavi, Shariati's thought advances a vision of human societies and civilizations "as products of intermixing rather than authenticity."<sup>81</sup> Examining the contemporary debates about the relationship between modernity and religious reformation in Iran in another essay, Mahdavi makes a case that while Shariati's progressive social and political message was lost in the revolutionary upheaval the discourse of radical religious reform that Shariati pioneered in pre-revolution Iran continues to be seen as a necessary social and political project in the post-revolutionary context.<sup>82</sup>

Among other academic commentators, Iranian political philosopher Bijan Abdolkarimi describes Shariati's critical engagement with both modernity and tradition as a "future oriented" and unfinished social and intellectual project whose revival could help Iranian society in facing the challenges of the modern world.<sup>83</sup> Iranian sociologist Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad also makes a case for Shariati's continued relevance in contemporary Iran by drawing attention to his simultaneous critique of tradition and modernity. According to Ghaneirad, Shariati charged both Western-centric "modernists" and backwards "traditionalists" with lacking intellectual independence and originality, and called for a "third way" between the blind imitation of the West and the uncritical embrace of tradition. According to Ghaneirad, Shariati's simultaneous critique of traditionalism and "modernism" distinguished his intellectual position from both

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<sup>81</sup> Mahdavi, "Radikalism az do didgah," 248.

<sup>82</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Max Weber in Iran: Does Islamic Protestantism Matter?" (paper presented at the 77th annual meeting for the Canadian Political Science Association, London, Ontario, June 2-4, 2005), 9, <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2005/Mahdavi.pdf> (accessed on 2 March 2012).

<sup>83</sup> Bijan Abdolkarimi, "Davate bozorg-e Shariati, tajdid-e ahd ba sonat-e tarikhi-e mast," (Shariati's Major Invitation was to Renew our Historical Traditions," 17 January 2012, Academy of Iranian Studies in London, <http://iranianstudies.org/fa/> (accessed 23 August 2012).

"Westernism and nativism."<sup>84</sup> Another Iranian sociologist, Maghsoud Farasatkhaah, agrees that Shariati's simultaneous critique of tradition and modernity and his innovative interpretation of Islamic thought continue to have social and political appeal in contemporary Iranian society. According to Farasatkhaah, by reviving the radical and egalitarian orientation of Shariati's thought, his contemporary intellectual followers in post-revolutionary Iran can present a "social-democratic" alternative to the emerging "bourgeois" and "liberal" currents in contemporary religious reform thought in Iran.<sup>85</sup>

#### *SHARIATI'S INTELLECTUAL FOLLOWERS IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN*

Prominent Iranian journalist Mohammad Ghouchani distinguishes between what he considers to be six generations of Shariati's intellectual followers in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran.<sup>86</sup> Ghouchani's categorization, while open to contestation, nevertheless, reveals the simultaneous existence of distinct, even competing and contradictory, readings of Shariati's thought both before and after the 1979 revolution. The first generation of Shariati's followers, according to Ghouchani, interpreted his teachings in a way that was favourable to their militant approach and their attraction to the idea of Islamic socialism. The most prominent

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<sup>84</sup> Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "A Critical Review of the Iranian Attempts at the Development of Alternative Sociologies," in *Facing Unequal World: Challenges For a Global Sociology*, Volume Two: Asia, ed. Michael Burawoy, Mau-kuei Chang, and Michelle Fei-yu Hsieh, (Taiwan: Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica, Council of National Association of the International Sociological Association, and Academia Sinica, 2010), 39.

<sup>85</sup> Maghsoud Farasatkhaah, "Shesh tipe roshanfekre dini" ("Six Types of Religious Intellectualism"), *Islah Web*, 15 November 2009 <http://www.islahweb.org/node/2879> (accessed 17 November 2012).

<sup>86</sup> Mohammad Ghouchani, "Shesh nasl farzandan-e Shariati" ("Six Generations of Shariati's Children"), *Khordad*, 28, Khordad 1383/17 June 2004. Also see: Mohammad Ghouchani, *Seh eslam: maktab-e Najaf, maktab-e Ghom, maktab-e Tehran* (Three Islams: Najaf School, Qom School, Tehran School) (Tehran: Saraee, 1385/2006).

representatives of this generation were groups such as the Organization of the People's Mojahedin of Iran who were actively recruiting members among those who attended Shariati's lectures at the Hosseinieh Ershad in Tehran during the late 1960s. The second generation sought to reconcile Shariati's radical teachings with the more theologically-oriented teachings of Morteza Motahari (a disciple of Ruhollah Khomeini and one of the regular speakers at the Hosseinieh Ershad). Among the leading figures of this generation, Gouchani points to Mir Hossein Mousavi and Zahra Rahnava.<sup>87</sup> The third generation of Shariati's followers emerged in the immediate post-revolution period and included militant groups such as the Forghan Group (*gorooh-e forghan*), who used Shariati's radical critique of the clerical establishment to justify the terror of prominent figures of the clergy including Morteza Motahari (1920-1979) and Mohammad Mofatteh (1928-1979). The fourth generation sought to continue Shariati's project of religious reform and to reconcile Islamic doctrines with the ideas of democracy, secularism, and human rights. The representatives of this generation include various figures associated with an Iranian opposition group known as the Nationalist-Religious Coalition (*etelaaf-e melli mazhabi*) including Majid Sharif (1950-1998), Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, Reza Alijani, and Taghi Rahmani. Ghouchani calls the fifth generation the "rebellious generation" of Shariati's intellectual followers. According to him, in the post-Cold War era and with the

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<sup>87</sup> The husband and wife who regularly attended Shariati's lectures at Hosseinieh Ershad became influential figures in post-revolutionary Iran. Mousavi served at the Prime Minister of Iran from 1981 to 1989. Rahnava too served as the Chancellor of Tehran's Alzahra University from 1998 to 2006, as well as an advisor to reformist president, Mohammad Khatami. In 2009, Mousavi was one of the two reformist candidates (along with Mehdi Karubi) in Iran's disputed presidential election and both he and Rahnava have been under house arrest since the eruption of post-election protests.

triumph of liberalism, a group of Shariati's former students led by Abdolkarim Soroush began to distance itself from Shariati and to criticize him for what it saw at the ideologization of religion. The sixth generation, argues Ghouhani, has emerged in response to this post-revolution critique of Shariati's radical discourse. This group links Shariati's teachings not to Lenin's vanguardism, but instead to the ideas of a range of post-modern thinkers including Foucault, Adorno, Marcuse, Baudrillard, and Derrida by emphasizing existentialist elements of Shariati's thought. Ghouhani further argues that while philosophically and theoretically this group remains critical of modernity, politically it seeks secularism, democracy, and some form of republicanism. Ghouhani refers to Ehsan Shariati, Reza Alijani, and Hashem Aghajari as the most prominent representatives of this latest generation of Shariati's followers.<sup>88</sup>

The group that Ghouhani identifies as the sixth generation of Shariati's intellectual followers has come to be known in recent years as the "neo-Shariati" current. For Maghsoud Farasatkhaah, the recent emergence of this intellectual current is the latest manifestation of Shariati's continued presence and influence in post-revolutionary Iranian society.<sup>89</sup> Noting that for neo-Shariatis the utopia of Shariati's Islamic ideology was not the vision that Islamists advanced in the post-revolution era, Farasatkhaah argues that neo-Shariatis continue, on the one hand, to critique the discourse and the legacy of traditionalism and Islamism, and on the other, to identify the capacities of religious ideology in the evolutionary process

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<sup>88</sup> Ghouhani, "Shesh nasl farzandan-e shariati."

<sup>89</sup> Maghsoud Farasatkhaah, "Roshanfekri dini: istadeh bar sar" ("Religious Intellectuals: Standing on Its Feet,") (paper presented at Religion and Modernity seminar, Tehran, September 2007) <http://e-b-a.blogfa.com/post-11.aspx> (accessed 20 February 2012).

of social and political transformation within Iranian society.<sup>90</sup> Shireen Hunter, too, attributes the rise of the "neo-Shariati" current to a "newfound interest" in Shariati's ideas in contemporary Iranian society.<sup>91</sup> The neo-Shariati label, she argues, refers to a leftist orientation among some of the current critics of the Islamic Republic who continues to favour a reformist Islamic discourse on the basis of a new interpretation of Shariati's ideas.<sup>92</sup> According to Hunter, in the post-revolution context neo-Shariatis have tried "to portray [Shariati] as a democrat, believing first and foremost in the cultural transformation of society."<sup>93</sup>

Mahdavi's "Post-Islamist Trends in Postrevolutionary Iran," is also among the first scholarly works in English to examine the emerging neo-Shariati discourse in some detail. According to Mahdavi, in post-revolutionary Iran, neo-Shariatis represent one current within the broader religious-reform movement. He names Ehsan Shariati, Susan Shariati, Sara Shariati, Reza Alijani, Hassan Yusefi-Eshkevari, Taqi Rahmani, Ahmad Zeidabadi, and members of the Research Bureau of Ali Shariati in Tehran as some of the major figures of this current.<sup>94</sup> According to Mahdavi, neo-Shariatis seek to historicise and contextualize Shariati's thought, firstly, by making a distinction between a "young" and a "mature" Shariati, and secondly, by making a distinction between what they see as "intrinsic" and "contingent" ideas in Shariati's thought.<sup>95</sup> Mahdavi also notes that neo-Shariatis draw attention to the "unthoughts" of Shariati's thought and the

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<sup>90</sup> Farasatkhaah, "Roshanfekri dini."

<sup>91</sup> Hunter, "Islamic Reformist Discourses," 50.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 50-56.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>94</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Post-Islamist Trends in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011), 95 footnote 7.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 102.

"unfinished" nature of his project. Thus, he asserts, while remaining faithful to Shariati's core ideas neo-Shariatis maintain that the "postrevolutionary context requires new thinking."<sup>96</sup>

Mahdavi's analysis also draws attention to the fact that unlike Shariati's era in post-revolutionary Iran neo-Shariatis are faced with a religious state. According to him, while neo-Shariatis reject the notion of a religious state they nevertheless hold that "modern spirituality, not organized religion, can play a constructive role in the public sphere."<sup>97</sup> Outlining some of the unthoughts of Shariati's thought, Mahdavi argues that "While Shariati never explicitly supported a secular democracy, neo-Shariati discourse explicitly rejects the concept of an Islamic state and advocates a secular ... democracy."<sup>98</sup> Citing a number of prominent neo-Shariati figures, Mahdavi makes the case that the neo-Shariati reading of Shariati's thought constitutes "a humanistic Islamic discourse in that people are the only true representatives of God on Earth."<sup>99</sup> He also draws attention to neo-Shariatis' view of a democratic secular model which separates the "religious and political institutions," but gives recognition to religion as a source of inspiration for normative values "in the individual, social, and political sphere."<sup>100</sup> Moreover, Mahdavi notes that in addition to contributing to "intellectual debates," neo-Shariatis are also "socio-politically active in civil society and human rights

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<sup>96</sup> Mahdavi, "Post-Islamist Trends," 102.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 105-106.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 106.



organizations" and in some cases have been faced with imprisonment and other forms of political repression.<sup>101</sup>

#### *A POST-REVOLUTION READING OF A REVOLUTIONARY DISCOURSE*

While neo-Shariatis regard Shariati as a "teacher of revolution" and acknowledge his role in the development of a revolutionary Islamic ideology during the 1960s and the 1970s, they nevertheless challenge the conventional understanding of the nature and content of his revolutionary project.<sup>102</sup> According to Susan Shariati, Shariati's approach was neither one of "revolutionary idealism," which seeks change by any means and at any price, nor "reformism," which modifies the appearances of a flawed system and seeks a slow process of revisions. Instead, she argues, the methodology that Shariati utilized was one of "revolutionary reform," which emphasizes revising the forms and revolutionizing the content of traditional norms and practices.<sup>103</sup> Susan Shariati further argues that contrary to the other revolutionary discourses of his time in Iranian society, Shariati's "revolutionary reform" approach was not centred exclusively on change in political power. In her view, rather than simply advocating political change Shariati's revolutionary project emphasized a change in social consciousness,

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<sup>101</sup> Mahdavi, "Post-Islamist Trends," 106.

<sup>102</sup> Susan Shariati, "Shariati, moalem kodam enghelab?" ("Shariati, the Teacher of Which Revolution?"), *Shahrvand Emrooz*, Bahman 1386/February 2008, <http://www.slideshare.net/sco1385/ss-1762422> (accessed 11 July 2011). Also see: Susan Shariati, "Shaieh-ei beh nam-e Shariati" ("A Rumor Called Shariati"), *Etemad*, 2 Esfand 1386/21 February 2008, <http://www.slideshare.net/sco1385/ss-1762423> (accessed 11 July 2011).

<sup>103</sup> Susan Shariati, "Shariati, moalem kodam enghelab?." Shariati himself rejects the revolution vs. reform dichotomy and favors what he refers to as "reformist revolution" (*enghelab-e eslahi*) which he defines as "a deep and rooted revolution, a revolution in norms, visions, and feelings, an ideological and cultural revolution ... aimed at social change rather than individual reform." See: Ali Shariati, *Iqbal and Us: Collected Works 5 (Ma va Iqbal: majmooeh asaar 5)*, (Aachen, Germany: Hosseinieh Ershad, 1978), 43.

which was to be initiated through raising revolutionary awareness among the masses.<sup>104</sup> Noting that Shariati was aware of the dangers of a revolutionary change at the political level without a deep transformation at the cultural-social level, she quotes Shariati that, "revolution before awareness is nothing short of disaster." Challenging the view that attributes the post-revolution rise of Islamist discourses and practices to Shariati's revolutionary Islamic discourse, Susan Shariati argues that the post-revolution course in fact reflects the kind of social and cultural malaises that Shariati's project sought to critique and pre-empt.<sup>105</sup>

In their effort to contextualize Shariati's project, some neo-Shariatis have noted that despite Shariati's popularity his discourse was not the dominant discourse in the movement that led to the 1979 revolution. Citing Shariati's critique of armed struggle at a time when various leftist and religious currents advocated that approach, Susan Shariati, for instance, argues that Shariati's radicalism was often critical of the dominant oppositional discourse which advocated "rapid political change."<sup>106</sup> Similarly, Ehsan Shariati argues that in the mid-1970s, and as the revolutionary movement was on the rise, Shariati tried to introduce an alternative paradigm to the prevailing paradigm of armed

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<sup>104</sup> As Chapter Three discusses, Neo-Shariatis, too, generally favour society-centred approaches to change over state-centred approaches to sociopolitical change.

<sup>105</sup> Susan Shariati, "Shariati, moalem kodam enghelab?." Also see: Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Autobiography," in Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, 41-45. For Yousefi Eshkevari the core message of Shariati's teachings was that "awareness and reason ... should come before any kind of political or social revolution." But Yousefi Eshkevari also believes that Shariati's message was lost on a generation motivated by revolutionary fervor and says that he himself did not understand the importance of this message until some years after the revolution.

<sup>106</sup> Susan Shariati, "Shariati, moalem kodam enghelab?." Also see: Susan Shariati, "Simay-e yek zendani: negahi beh ketab-e Shariati beh revaiat-e asnad-e savak," ("The Portrait of a Prisoner: A Look at a Book Titled Shariati As Narrated by SAVAK Documents"), in *Ghoghnoos-essian: revaiati digar az andisheh doktor Shariati (The Rebellious Phoenix: Another Account of the Thought of Dr. Shariati)*, ed. Amir Rezaei, (Tehran: Ghasidehsara, 2002), 133-178.

resistance.<sup>107</sup> According to Ehsan Shariati, at a time when "the defining characteristic of Iranian society was an overriding revolutionary spirit," Shariati's main project was to initiate an "intellectual revolution." Thus, Ehsan Shariati argues, Shariati's challenge during the period at the Hosseinieh Ershad was to persuade "a revolutionary generation ready for battle to turn its attention to sustainable change."<sup>108</sup>

Emphasizing the approach of "revolutionary reform," some neo-Shariatists continue to advocate the concept of perpetual revolution. For instance, referring to Thomas Kuhn's work on the subject, Ehsan Shariati defines revolution as "a set of epistemological breaks which are necessary for qualitative change and which occur in every period." Ehsan Shariati, thus, favours advancing the approach of revolutionary reform in post-revolutionary Iran, arguing that in some ways, "in Iran we are still waiting for a revolution."<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, Ehsan Shariati problematizes the claim made by Abdolkarim Soroush and a number of other contemporary religious intellectuals that while Shariati's project aimed to reconcile Islam and revolution, the project of post-revolution religious intellectuals is one of reconciling Islam and democracy. Pointing to the historical links between popular revolutionary movements and the expansion of political and economic democracy in Europe and elsewhere, Ehsan Shariati argues that far

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<sup>107</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "*Hamchenan armangara, enghelabi, va ideolojik hastam*," ("I Remain Utopian, Revolutionary, and Ideological"), interview with Susan Shariati, *Shahrvand-e Emrooz*, 10 Tir 1387/30 June 2008, <http://shahrvandemrooz.blogfa.com/post-557.aspx> (accessed 3 November 2011).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

from being opposing objectives revolution and democracy can be seen as one and the same.<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, while many neo-Shariatis acknowledge the "ideological" character of Shariati's discourse, they challenge the conventional critique of Shariati's ideological approach by questioning the prevailing Marxian/post-Marxian, liberal, and post-modern definitions and critiques of ideology.<sup>111</sup> Hossein Mesbahian, among others, rejects the definition of ideology as dogma and points to "an ideological tradition" (from Destutt de Tracy's notion of ideology to György Lukács's theory of class consciousness) of critiquing the status quo and the prevailing norms and ideas that legitimize the prevailing forces and relations within a given society.<sup>112</sup> According to Mesbahian, Shariati was the first Iranian intellectual to seek to understand the "neglected foundations" of this ideological tradition.<sup>113</sup> Shariati, he contends, was aware of the conventional conception of ideology as dogma and rejected it by arguing that certainty and "lack of intellectual pluralism lead to stagnation and demise."<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, in Mesbahian's view, true to the original meaning of ideology Shariati sought to identify an alternative worldview from the vantage point of which to critique the

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<sup>110</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Hamchenan armangara."

<sup>111</sup> Sara Shariati, "Zaman-e omid" ("The Era of Hope"), 17 April 2011, Sara Shariati Internet Archives, [http://sarahshariati.blogspot.ca/2011/04/blog-post\\_1023.html](http://sarahshariati.blogspot.ca/2011/04/blog-post_1023.html) (accessed 23 December 2012). In Iran, Dariush Sheyegan is perhaps the most prominent critique of ideology in Shariati's thought from a post-modern perspective, while Abdolkarim Soroush and a range of other religious and secular intellectuals have often critiqued Shariati's "ideologization of religion" from the vantage point of liberalism.

<sup>112</sup> Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab, "Defa-e johari az mantegh darooni-e ideolojy: rooyarooyee ba bardasht-haye nadorost," ("A Foundational Defense of the Internal Logic of Ideology: Challenging Misconceptions"), in *Dar hashiyeh matn (On the Margins of the Text)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Shahr-e Aftab, 1379/2000), 40.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>114</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 27, 42, quoted in (Mesbahian) Rahyab, "Defa-e johari az mantegh darooni-e ideolojy," 110.

prevailing ideas and to identify relative alternatives.<sup>115</sup>

Shariati's own definition of ideology distinguishes between three distinct and interconnected components: "First, a worldview, or general assumptions about the world, life, and the individual; second, a critical analysis of the existing conditions and of the various factors which inform our understanding of these conditions; and third, realistic alternatives and practical solutions."<sup>116</sup> Ideology, thus understood, is an evolutionary orientation informed by an "inherent desire for cognition and critique" and a human "need to find more desirable alternatives."<sup>117</sup> Similarly, rejecting the conception of ideology as a "closed system of beliefs," Sara Shariati argues that ideology in fact indicates a general orientation and implies a sense of commitment to and active engagement with a set of ideals. Drawing on the analysis of Canadian sociologist Fernand Dumont, Sara Shariati problematizes the discourse of "the end of ideology" as a discourse which predicts the end of hope rather than indicating the end of illusions.<sup>118</sup>

It is in light of the above definition of ideology that neo-Shariatis explain and defend Shariati's project of ideological religion.<sup>119</sup> According to Ehsan Shariati, ideologization of religion was not a project against critical rationality. For him, Shariati's project involved a "critical engagement with religion" and was aimed at "identifying the spiritual, dynamic, and evolving aspects of religion,

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<sup>115</sup> (Mesbahian) Rahyab, "Defa-e johari az mantegh darooni-e ideoloji," 117.

<sup>116</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 23, 70-71, quoted in (Mesbahian) Rahyab, "Defa-e johari az mantegh darooni-e ideoloji," 116.

<sup>117</sup> (Mesbahian) Rahyab, "Defa-e johari az mantegh darooni-e ideoloji," 115.

<sup>118</sup> Sara Shariati, "Zaman-e omid."

<sup>119</sup> See: Reza Alijani, ed., *Ideoloji: zaroorat ya parhiz va goriz (Ideology: Necessity or Avoidance)*, (Tehran: Chapakhsh, 1380/2001).

critiquing its historical, legal, and class functions, and preserving that which is transcendental."<sup>120</sup> Moreover, neo-Shariatis also emphasize the secularizing effect of the project of ideologization of religion. Susan Shariati, for example, points out that by distinguishing between the different historical manifestations, social functions, and political orientations of religion Shariati's notion of religion as ideology contributed to the secularization of religion in contemporary Iranian society.<sup>121</sup> Ehsan Shariati further spells out this secularization effect by emphasizing the separation between the realms of ideology and governance. According to him, while ideology may determine one's general orientation in his/her relations with others, its institutionalization and formalization at the state level is undesirable and potentially disastrous. He thus suggests that the separation of ideology (including religious ideology) from the state is assumed in Shariati's thought and must be acknowledged and protected in any modern political structure.<sup>122</sup>

Finally, like many other commentators on Shariati's thought, neo-Shariatis acknowledge that the relationship between tradition and modernity constitutes one of the central themes in Shariati's thought. In the neo-Shariati reading, Shariati aims not only to reconcile the experience of the encounter with Western/colonial modernity with the objective conditions of a traditional Iranian society, but also to identify relevant alternatives to the hegemonic discourse of authoritarian modernism. Sara Shariati, among others, notes that at a time when modernization

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<sup>120</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Hamchenan armangara."

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

had become the prevailing paradigm, rather than advocating a wholesale rejection or acceptance of modernity, Shariati advanced "a selective approach" to modern concepts and institutions. Rejecting the meta-narratives of tradition and modernity and drawing attention to the contextual particularities and contingencies, Shariati's approach aimed to "identify that which is useful and necessary for the particular context of his society." Accordingly, while Shariati favoured adopting "the universal fruits of modernity (i.e. science, technology, and democracy as a means of controlling and distributing power)," he, nevertheless, acknowledged "the different conceptions and cultural experiences of modernity."<sup>123</sup> Rejecting the mechanical separation between tradition and modernity, and having the European experiences of Reformation and Renaissance in mind, Shariati held that each society arrives at its own modernity through a radical restructuring of its prevailing tradition. Thus, Sara Shariati argues, the concept of an indigenous or religious modernity suggests not "the bridging together of two distinct entities, but instead the synthesis of desirable elements in each."<sup>124</sup>

In the neo-Shariati reading, the project of indigenous modernity is at the core of Shariati's "revolutionary ideology."<sup>125</sup> It is seen as a revolutionary mission to be advanced through raising individual and social consciousness and a constant

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<sup>123</sup> Sara Shariati, "Dar bareh shara'iet-e emkan-e moderniteh dini," (On the Conditions for the Possibility of Religious Modernity"), in *Dar hashiyeh matn (On the Margins of the Text)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Shahr-e Aftab, 1379/2000), 159.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>125</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Nayandishideh mandeh haye falsafi andisheh ye mo'alem Shariati," ("The Philosophical Unthoughts of the Thought of Teacher Shariati"), in *Dar hashiyeh matn (On the Margins of the Text)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Shahr-e Aftab, 1379/2000), 9.

revisiting and restructuring of religious thought and cultural traditions.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the project assumes a dialectical relationship between the restructuring of tradition and sustainable sociopolitical development. On the one hand, it is maintained that meaningful and sustainable change requires an organic transformation of traditional norms, beliefs, and practices. On the other hand, it is argued, the task of restructuring tradition requires organic intellectuals who are thoroughly familiar with these traditions and, thus, can become agents of change by raising revolutionary (change-oriented) consciousness. The project of indigenous modernity, then, challenges the linear conceptions of modernity and the grand-narratives of social, economic, or historical determinism. In the words of Sara Shariati, indigenous modernity is aimed at "manipulating the force of historical determinism."<sup>127</sup>

For neo-Shariatis, the occurrence of a religious revolution at a time when the revolutionary ideology was still "incomplete and fragile" left unfinished the project that Shariati had initiated.<sup>128</sup> Ehsan Shariati, among others, argues that the 1979 revolution and the establishment of an Islamic state interrupted and posed a challenge to Shariati's project of "developing a spiritual account of political thought and a blueprint for an indigenous modernity."<sup>129</sup> In his view, in the post-

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<sup>126</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Nayandishideh mandeh haye falsafi," 9.

<sup>127</sup> Sara Shariati, "Dar bareh shara'iet-e emkan-e moderniteh dini," 159.

<sup>128</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Nayandishideh mandeh haye falsafi," 9.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. Other commentators, including Mahdavi, have also noted that with Shariati's sudden death and the ascendancy of Islamism during and after the 1979 revolution the religious reform movement was dealt with a major blow, and the discourse of Islamic radicalism was monopolized by Khomeini and his followers. However, it seems appropriate to add two qualifications here. First, Ehsan Shariati himself and other neo-Shariatis have often maintained that the real agents of revolutionary change are not intellectuals, but the masses of people. Second, even if a more comprehensive vision of "indigenous development" had been developed by Ali



revolution context where the amalgamation of religious and political power has reinforced the modern/traditional dichotomy in Iranian society the continuation of Shariati's unfinished project is a more urgent task than before.<sup>130</sup> Other neo-Shariatis, too, emphasize the need to revive and carry forward the task of reforming and restructuring religious thought and traditions in the post-revolution context.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, by drawing attention to changes in Iranian society over the last three and half decades, neo-Shariatis also seek to identify both the "unthoughts" of Shariati's thought and the new methodologies that must be utilized for advancing his unfinished project in the new context. In "The Philosophical Unthoughts in the Thoughts of Shariati the Teacher," for example, Ehsan Shariati makes a case that while Shariati proposed the slogan of "return to the Self" as a counter-discourse to the prevailing Western cultural imperialism and the Pahlavi regime's imported modernization agenda, the post-revolution context requires a different discourse. Thus, he suggests that Shariati's "return" is to be replaced with the thesis of "revisiting and restructuring of the Self."<sup>132</sup> Moreover, he contends that since both theses are informed by a philosophical vision of "a new world" and "a new human being," continuing Shariati's unfinished project requires a more serious philosophical engagement. According to Ehsan Shariati, while Shariati relied primarily on sociological and historical approaches, his emphasis on the need for a philosophical and spiritual revisiting of his project at

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Shariati or any other Iranian intellectual, there is little reason to believe that the revolution would have followed that envisioned path.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Sara Shariati, "Dar bareh shariat-e emkan-e moderniteh dini," 162-163; Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Edameh projeh na-tamam" ("Continuing an Unfinished Project"), interview with Reza Khojasteh Rahimi, *Toos* no. 764, Khordad 1377/June 1998, 30.

<sup>132</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Nayandishideh mandeh haye falsafi," 10.

the end of his life is helpful in determining the kind of approach that neo-Shariatis need to utilize today.<sup>133</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Despite the controversial and contested nature of his thought and legacy, certain common themes begin to emerge in examining the literature on Shariati by his critics as well as his followers. Most commentators have seen him, primarily, as a public intellectual committed to social transformation. Shariati's revolutionary discourse is often described as having been advanced along the lines of, or at least as having been largely influenced by, the egalitarian concerns and the social methodology of the leftist intellectual tradition. He is regarded as a critic of traditional readings of Islam and as one of the pioneers of the revival of Islamic social and political thought in the twentieth century. And finally, many have noted Shariati's engagement with a range of anti-colonial discourses in his critique of Western modernity. Nevertheless, disagreements persist among commentators about various aspects of Shariati's thought including his approach to social transformation, the substance of his revolutionary message and methodology, the Islamic content of his discourse, and the nature of his engagement with the question of modernity.

The neo-Shariati school can be distinguished from other pre- and post-revolution readings of Ali Shariati's thought in a number of ways. First, while

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<sup>133</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Nayandishideh mandeh haye falsafi," 10-11.

they acknowledge Shariati's influence on the rise of a revolutionary Islamic discourse during the 1970s, they, nevertheless, challenge the conventional view about the content of Shariati's revolutionary thought. Second, while neo-Shariatis acknowledge the ideological nature of Shariati's project, they problematize what they see as the prevailing liberal and post-modern critiques of ideology, and many prominent neo-Shariatis continue to advocate ideological and utopian social and political engagement. Third, while they continue to emphasize the necessity of attending to and restructuring both religious and cultural traditions in negotiating a contextually grounded modernity, by highlighting the contextual particularities of Iranian society and the historical co-constitution of tradition and modernity neo-Shariatis reject the charges of identitarianism and instrumentalist engagement with religion. In the neo-Shariati reading, the Islamic character of Shariati's thought is neither reducible to a simple project of authenticity, nor to an instrumentalist use of Islam's mobilization capacity or a Shi'i reclaiming of a Marxian utopia. Like Shariati, neo-Shariatis continue to engage with religion not only as a prevailing force that informs social and individual norms and relations within Iranian society, but also as a source of personal, ethical, and ontological inspiration.<sup>134</sup>

In post-revolutionary Iran, neo-Shariatis have sought to continue Shariati's "unfinished project" in at least three ways. First, like Shariati they continue to deconstruct both modernity and tradition, arguing that neither is totalizing,

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<sup>134</sup> Shariati himself sees Islam both as a cultural reality that informs the "prevailing social norms and traditions," as well as "an evolving social movement," which continues to serve as a source of inspiration. See: Ali Shariati, *Ma va Iqbal*, 97.

constant, and reducible to one civilization or another. While they acknowledge and continue to discuss the conditions and consequences of Enlightenment modernity in the West, they neither regard this experience as the only experience of modernity, nor do they see modernity as being essentially and particularly a "Western" phenomenon. Thus, a number of neo-Shariatis emphasize the universal nature of many modern concepts including individual reason and autonomy, equal citizenship rights, popular sovereignty, and institutional separation between religious and political power.

Second, like Shariati, neo-Shariatis hold that while all civilizations have something to offer to all of humanity, the particularity of histories, cultural interactions, and collective memories can give birth to different experiences of renewal, modernity, and progress. Colonial and imperial relations of domination and imported modernization models are identified as some of the factors that have contributed to the undermining of the recognition of difference and the plural manifestations of universal human experiences. Finally, by advocating a non-state-centric approach to social transformation and emphasizing the dialectic between normative and social change, the neo-Shariati school has sought to advance Shariati's approach of initiating social change through raising revolutionary consciousness. The project of indigenous modernity as advanced by neo-Shariatis favours engagement in grassroots, and also civil society activism and sees organic intellectuals as agents of raising a change-oriented consciousness.

As the previous section argued, for neo-Shariatis the project of indigenous modernity is a sustained effort toward radical sociocultural and sociopolitical transformation. In outlining this project neo-Shariatis also emphasize its egalitarian religious/spiritual ontology and its methodology of revolutionary consciousness-raising. Neo-Shariatis believe that the revival and continuation of this project could have important sociopolitical implications in post-revolutionary Iran, as well as in other contemporary Muslim societies. To expand on this and other major themes discussed in this chapter, Chapter Two will locate the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity in the broader context of ongoing debates about tradition and modernity in contemporary Islamic thought, and briefly examine the sociopolitical implications of these debates for contemporary Muslim societies.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NEGOTIATING MODERNITY IN MODERN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

#### **Introduction**

As the previous chapter showed, in the last two decades commentators including both critics and sympathizers have examined Shariati's thought primarily through the analytical lens of the encounter with modernity in Iran and other Muslim societies. According to critics, while Shariati's revolutionary brand of Islam freely borrowed from a variety of modern and non-Islamic sources, his call for a return to the local cultural and traditional sources of identity nevertheless constituted a turn against modernity and toward Islamic authenticity. Other commentators, however, challenge the reading of Shariati's thought as a counter-modern discourse of traditional/religious authenticity, and draw attention to his simultaneous critique of Western-centric modernism and religious/cultural traditionalism. As Shariati's intellectual heirs in contemporary Iran, the neo-Shariati current has drawn attention to Shariati's effort to identify the conditions for genuine, sustainable, and bottom-up cultural, social, and political development in Iran and other Muslim societies in the post-colonial context.

Expanding on the discussions from the previous chapter the present chapter seeks to locate Shariati's Islamic discourse and the new readings of his thought within the broader context of debates on modernity in contemporary

Islamic thought. How does Shariati's approach to modernity compare to the approaches of other leading Muslim thinkers since the nineteenth century? Does Shariati's critique of Westernization and his call for Islamic revival constitute a rejection of modernity and the humanist ideals of European Enlightenment, as his critics believe? Or does his Islamic discourse offer a contextually grounded vision of modernity that could contribute to the ongoing contestation between different visions of social and political development in Muslim societies, as his contemporary followers claim? But the term modernity is itself far from being a straightforward and clear-cut category. Is modernity a Western achievement rooted in the Enlightenment and European rationalism, or is it a universal condition whose non-Western articulations have been historically stifled by the violence of colonial modernity? Is it a hegemonic discourse of domination, or an emancipatory discourse of progressive social and political change? After a brief discussion about the competing conceptions of modernity and the encounter with colonial modernity in Muslim societies, the chapter focuses on the major responses to modernity by prominent Muslim thinkers since the nineteenth century. In examining these responses the chapter draws attention to both the points of convergence and divergence in the ways in which leading Muslim thinkers and the major currents in contemporary Islamic thought have encountered and responded to the question of modernity. The chapter then turns its focus on Shariati's thought and seeks to determine its relationship with other major Islamic responses to the encounter with modernity. Drawing on Shariati's own work and the new readings of his work by his contemporary intellectual

followers, the chapter locates Shariati within an ongoing effort in modern Islamic thought to negotiate a contextually grounded vision of modernity for Muslim societies through a novel reinterpretation of religious doctrines and the restructuring of religious thought in Islam.

### **Encountering Colonial Modernity in Muslim Societies**

In "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," Jürgen Habermas argues that at different historical turns the notion of "modernity" has come to articulate "the consciousness of an era that refers back to the past of classical antiquity precisely in order to comprehend itself as the result of a transition from the old to new."<sup>135</sup> According to Habermas, while the term "modern" was first used in the late fifth century to distinguish the Christian era from the pagan past, what is known as the "project of modernity" essentially began with the European Enlightenment. As a project, he argues, modernity meant "the relentless development of the objectivating sciences, of the universalistic foundations of morality and law, and of autonomous art," as well as the idea of "the rational organization of social relations." This is what Habermas regards as the "unfinished" project which needs to be revisited and revived in the face of a growing skepticism about modernity and its claims.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, ed. Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), 39.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



Critics of Habermas often highlight the lopsidedness and the Eurocentric bias of his account of modernity. Commenting on Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985), Fred Dallmayr distinguishes the lofty and noble side of modernity from its dark "underside." According to Dallmayr, in its idealistic claims modernity seeks to "to inaugurate a new age of human freedom and self-determination" juxtaposed against a previous era of "political, clerical, and intellectual tutelage." In its historical experience, however, modernity has been a project of imposing the mastery of the modern self over nature and the non-modern other.<sup>137</sup> Drawing on the contributions of Argentinian-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, Dallmayr argues that in the context of the prevailing global power asymmetries, "the totalizing ambitions of Western modernity" create sharply different experiences in the hegemonic global North and the dominated global South.<sup>138</sup>

In critiquing the Eurocentric conceptualization of modernity by commentators such as Habermas, another group of scholars has drawn attention to a range of pre-colonial and non-European experiences of modernity. Among others, prominent Indian-American scholar of Indian history Sanjay Subrahmanyam regards modernity to be a global phenomenon with distinct and multilingual histories. In "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia" (1997) Subrahmanyam proposes a conception of modernity delinked "from a particular European trajectory" and one which

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<sup>137</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "The Underside of Modernity: Adorno, Heidegger, and Dussel," *Constellations* 11, no 1 (2004), 102.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

represents "a more-or-less global shift, with many different sources and roots, and - inevitably - many different forms and meanings depending on which society we look at it from."<sup>139</sup> Similarly, in examining the historical context of what he refers to as a "Persianate modernity," Iranian-Canadian historian Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi rejects the "conventional" story of modernity as a product of "Enlightenment" and "Occidental rationalism." In "The Homeless Texts of Persianate Modernity" (2001), Tavakoli-Targhi defines modernity as a historical-global process that began to unfold around the sixteenth century with divergent manifestations in different parts of the world.<sup>140</sup>

It is, nevertheless, widely accepted that colonialism and the globalization of the Western order altered the course of these pre-colonial non-European experiences of modernity and directly and indirectly shaped the subsequent processes of cultural, sociopolitical, and economic change throughout the non-West.<sup>141</sup> As José Casanova points out, despite the historical deconstruction of, and the deep contemporary doubt about, the category of "Western modernity," it remains an undeniable reality of our world that capitalism and the nation-state structure have been on a "self-propelled march toward a world system," wrecking and challenging all other life forms, traditions, and social and political formations

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<sup>139</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1997), 737.

<sup>140</sup> Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "The Homeless Texts of Persianate Modernity," *Cultural Dynamics* 13, no. 3 (November 2001): 263-291, 265. Also see: Abbas Milani, *Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran* (Washington: Mage, 2004), 10-11.

<sup>141</sup> See: Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 62; Bassam Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam: A Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific-Technological Age*, trans., by Judith von Sivers (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 2; Enrique Dussel, "World-System and 'Trans'-Modernity," *Nepantla: Views from South* 3, no. 2 (2002), 222.

that stand in their way.<sup>142</sup> The condition to which Casanova's analysis points has given modernity different meanings and contents in the non-West. On the one hand, the global expansion of the tenets and structures of Western modernity has created, among certain sectors, a pull toward modernity and a desire to adapt to a condition that claims universality. On the other hand, however, it has also created a push against modernity among other sectors who regard its claim of universality as a threat against particularity and difference. As Dallmayr and Devy (1998) note, this condition has also given modernity a dual function in many non-Western societies as a "vehicle of colonialism" as well as "the harbinger of social transformation and emancipation."<sup>143</sup> Similarly, Hunter notes that while in many non-Western societies modernity is generally associated with a history of colonialism, foreign domination, and attacks on indigenous cultures and identities, non-Europeans have nonetheless sought "to acquire the results of modernity" in order to resist Western imperial expansionism.<sup>144</sup>

The experiences of Muslim societies with colonial modernity were not radically different from those of many other non-Western societies. Muslims' first encounter with Western Enlightenment modernity occurred in the aftermath of military setbacks and "through the gun barrel of colonialism."<sup>145</sup> While European colonialism in Muslim lands had begun in the sixteenth century, the encounter

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<sup>142</sup> José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 234.

<sup>143</sup> Fred Dallmayr, G.N. Devy, "Introduction," in *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity: A Twentieth Century Anthology*, ed. Fred Dallmayr, G.N. Devy (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998), 16.

<sup>144</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, "Introduction," in *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2008), 10.

<sup>145</sup> Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 43.

with Enlightenment modernity followed a series of nineteenth century Russian military advances against Iran, and British-French conquests in other parts of the Middle East and Northern Africa. The post-World War I partitioning of the Ottoman Empire further facilitated the acceleration of "western cultural penetration and military domination" over Muslim territories.<sup>146</sup>

Ever since this initial encounter, the question of modernity has been a central theme in Islamic political thought. In contemporary Muslim societies, debates on modernity, both as a condition and as a project, are ongoing and seem far from having been exhausted. Contemporary debates on a range of social and political issues, from democratization, socioeconomic development, and globalization, to cultural identity and the relationship between religion and politics in modern society continue to be examined with reference to the analytical framework of tradition and modernity.<sup>147</sup> Many of the leading scholars

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<sup>146</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "The Revivalist Literature and the Literature on Revival: An Introduction," in Yvonne Yazbeck et al., *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 3. Also see: John Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 43.

<sup>147</sup> For some examples see: Kamran Talattof, *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of Popular Iranian Female Artists* (Syracuse U Press, 2011); Bassam Tibi, *Islam's Predicament with Modernity: Religious Reform and Cultural Change* (NY: Routledge, 2009); Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore, Martin van Bruinessen, eds, *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates* (Edinburg U Press, 2009); Shireen T. Hunter, ed., *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity* (NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009); Michael J. Mazarr, *Unmodern Men in the Modern World: Radical Islam, Terrorism, and the War on Modernity* (NY: Cambridge U Press, 2007); Anna Frangoudaki, Çağlar Keyder, *Ways to Modernity in Greece and Turkey: Encounter with Europe, 1850-1959* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Serif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey*, (Syracuse U Press, 2006); Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling Under Communism* (U of Washington Press, 2006); Brian Silverstein, "Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey: Hermeneutics, Traditions, Genealogy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47:1 (January, 2005); Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Iran Between Tradition and Modernity*, (Maryland: Lexington, 2004); Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Barbara Freyer Stowasser, eds. *Islamic Law and the Challenge of Modernity* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004); Ashk P. Dahlén, *Islamic Law, Epistemology and Modernity: Legal Philosophy in Contemporary Iran* (Routledge, 2003); Tala Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford U Press, 2003); Golnar Mehran, "The Paradox of Tradition and Modernity in Female Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Comparative*

in Muslim societies are preoccupied with determining the precise nature of the relationship between Islam and modernity. Is Islamic religious thought compatible with the modern values of democracy, human rights, equal citizenship rights, gender equality, and pluralism? Is secularism, or the separation of religious and political authority, compatible with Muslim traditions? Or, is Islam inherently hostile to the norms and structures of the modern world?

Similarly, in the Western academy the question of compatibility or incompatibility of Islam and modernity has long preoccupied Orientalists and many other historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists. Nineteenth century French Orientalist, Ernest Renan, for example, held that Islam and Muslim societies were particularly hostile to modernity. Renan famously argued that as the antithesis of Europe, "Islam is the disdain of science, the suppression of civil society; it is the appalling simplicity of the Semitic spirit, restricting the human mind, closing it to all delicate ideas, to all refined sentiment,

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*Education Review* 47, no. 3 (August, 2003): 269-288.; Mo'asseseh-ye Ma'refat va Pazhuhesh, ed. *sonnat va sekularizm: goftar-ha-i az 'abdol-karim soroush, mohammad mojtahed shabestari, mostafa malekian, mohsen kadivar* (*Tradition and Secularism: Selections from the Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, Mostafa Malekian, Mohsen Kadivar*) (Tehran: Serat, 2002); Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity: Secular Liberal and Left-wing Political Thought in Egypt 1945-1958* (London: Routledge, 2002); Said Amir Arjomand, "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 4 (2002): 719-731; Dietrich Jung, and Wolfgang Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads: Ottoman Legacies and a Greater Middle East* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Nezar Al-Sayyad, *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism* (NY: Routledge, 2001); Almut Höfert, Armando Salvatore, *Between Europe and Islam: Shaping Modernity in a Transcultural Space* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2000); Sibel Bozdoğan, Reşat Kasaba, *Rethinking modernity and national identity in Turkey* (U of Washington Press, 1997).

to all rational research, in order to keep it facing an eternal tautology: God is God."<sup>148</sup>

At least two events in recent decades contributed to a rapid surge of interest among Western academics in the subject of Islam and modernity. The first was the end of the Cold War in the last decade of the twentieth century. With the fall of the Communist Soviet Union, Islam became the new enemy of the West and its liberal democracy.<sup>149</sup> The second occurred in the first decade of the new millennium. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent United States-led War on Terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq (as well as in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Mali, and elsewhere) brought new attention to sociopolitical discourses about the inherent inability or unwillingness of Muslims to embrace modern notions of secularism, democracy, and pluralism.<sup>150</sup>

Increasingly, however, Muslim and non-Muslim commentators are challenging the dichotomous construction of the modern West versus the non-modern Rest. Among the better-known contemporary formulations of the West/Rest binary, Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* theses have been the subject of numerous critiques.<sup>151</sup> Emphasizing cultural hybridity and the historical interaction among

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<sup>148</sup> Ernest Renan, quoted in Charles Kurzman ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>149</sup> See: Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthoughts in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 18; Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

<sup>150</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*, (Stanford U Press, 2003), 9-10.

<sup>151</sup> For some examples see: Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation* 273, no. 12 (October 22, 2001): 11-14; Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (New York: Verso, 2003); Mojtaba Mahdavi and Andy Knight, "On the 'Dignity of

diverse cultural traditions, critics have highlighted the universality of modern norms and concepts and argued that "the West" is in fact "an amalgamation of multiple traditions, including the Greek, Roman, Judaic, Christian, and Islamic."<sup>152</sup> Moreover, a range of theories of multiple modernities are increasingly challenging the dominant Eurocentric and monocivilizational view of modernity and drawing attention to the unique modern experiences of social, cultural, political, and economic change in various Western and non-Western societies.<sup>153</sup>

These critical discourses have also contributed to the radical deconstruction of the dichotomous and co-constitutive paradigms of hegemonic universalism and essentialist culturalism. In its various manifestations, hegemonic universalism advances a narrative of "the West" as the universal trajectory of modernity and progress, thus dismissing the histories and the experiences of the non-West. The paradigm has informed a great deal of academic debates as well as various, and largely failed, top-down modernization and secularization programs seeking to transform Muslim societies in the image of European modernity. Viewing Western and Islamic traditions as culturally homogenous and mutually exclusive units, essentialist culturalism presents a picture of constant collision and clash between nations, civilizations, and cultural traditions. In the aftermath of the

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Difference': Neither the 'End of History' nor the 'Clash of Civilizations,'" *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict*, (Winter 2008): 27-41; Hamid Dabashi, "For the Last Time: Civilizations," *International Sociology* 16, no. 3 (September 2001): 361-8.

<sup>152</sup> Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Introduction," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 32.

<sup>153</sup> See: Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Masoud Kamali, *Multiple Modernities, Civil Society and Islam: The Case of Iran and Turkey* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005); S.N. Eisenstadt ed., *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002); Modjtaba Sadria ed., *Multiple Modernities in Muslim Societies* (London: IB Tauris, 2009); Aryn B. Sajoo ed., *Muslim Modernities: Expressions of the Civil Imagination* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

events of 11 September 2001 and the launching of the War on Terrorism this discourse came to inform a great deal of the political rhetoric and modes of social and political mobilization in both Western and Muslim societies.<sup>154</sup>

The critique of hegemonic universalism and essentialist culturalism by a range of critical scholars has revealed a continued effort by Muslim thinkers to negotiate a third way between the total acceptance and the total rejection of modernity. Since the late nineteenth century, the former position has often been championed in Muslim societies by a group of Western-oriented (and often Western-educated) elites who call for the modernization of their societies through Westernization and top-down secularization.<sup>155</sup> In Iran for instance, prominent intellectuals such as Mirza Malkam Khan (1833-1908) and Hassan Taghizadeh (1878-1970) called for the unequivocal embrace of Western civilization and culture.<sup>156</sup> The latter position, or that of the total rejection of modernity, is advocated primarily by some of the Islamic Ulama as well as by contemporary Muslim traditionalists who call for bypassing modernity and returning to Islamic traditions in the face of modern challenges.<sup>157</sup> Leading contemporary traditionalists such as Seyed Hossein Nasr reject not only what they see as "Western" notions of "democracy," "popular sovereignty," and "republicanism," but also any attempt to deviate from traditional Islamic teachings through the

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<sup>154</sup> See: Edward Said, "The Clash of Definitions," in *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003): 68-88.

<sup>155</sup> Hunter, "Introduction," 14.

<sup>156</sup> Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Introduction," in *Iran between Tradition and Modernity*, ed. Ramin Jahanbegloo (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), xiii.

<sup>157</sup> Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, "Editor's Introduction: Contemporary Islamic Thought: One or Many?," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 15.



introduction of such categories as "Islamic ideology," "political Islam," and "Islamic democracy."<sup>158</sup> Against the dichotomous forces of modernism and traditionalism, a host of contemporary Muslim thinkers have sought to advance a simultaneous critique of Western modernity and local cultures and traditions and to identify, in the words of one scholar, "strategies for successfully being-in-the-(modern)-world and not exiting from it."<sup>159</sup> Thus, even when Islamist thinkers such as Qutb, Maududi, and Khomeini position themselves against modernity and call for alternatives to modern norms and structures, they nevertheless advance a modern reading of Islam by advocating a departure from the prevailing religious and cultural traditions, the adoption of modern science and technology, and the use of the capacities of the modern nation-state to implement their particular interpretation of Islam.

While the present discussion highlights some of the continuities and overlaps in modern Islamic thought, it is nevertheless attentive to the diversity and differences that characterizes the discourses of a wide range of post-nineteenth century Muslim thinkers. Far from having fixed meanings and sociopolitical connotations, in modern Islamic thought modernity and Islam have served as floating signifiers reflecting contesting normative assumptions and distinct contextual determinants. As a floating signifier, modernity has represented a range of concepts, values, and institutions from industrialization and

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<sup>158</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Goftam ba taraghi mokhalefām, cheh resad beh kanoon taraghi" ("Firmly Opposed to Taraghi Center") interview with Hamed Zare, *Mehrnameh* 23, 30 Tir 1391/20 July 2012, 115.

<sup>159</sup> Kamran Matin, "Decoding Political Islam: Uneven and Combined Development and Ai Shariati's Political Thought," in *International Relations and non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (London: Routledge, 2010), 111.

socioeconomic development (both capitalist and socialist), to secularism, individual rights and freedoms, pluralism, and democracy.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, as a floating signifier, Islam has been articulated by both religious and secular thinkers as a source of methodological and/or ontological inspiration, a discourse of mass mobilization, a call for the recognition of cultural difference, and a shield against modern relativism and the crisis of identity.<sup>161</sup>

### **Modernity and Contemporary Islamic Thought**

Commentators often distinguish between three major categories or currents within modern Islamic thought.<sup>162</sup> In much of the academic literature the genesis of modern Islamic thought begins in the late nineteenth century with the rise of Islamic modernism, and continues throughout the twentieth century and presently with Islamism and Islamic reformism. Far from representing monolithic, neatly

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<sup>160</sup> See: Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992), 31; Aryn B. Sajoo, "Introduction: Civic Quests and Bequests," in *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Aryn B. Sajoo (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002), 1-3.

<sup>161</sup> See: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "The Modernization of Islam or the Islamization of Modernity," in *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Routledge Curzon Press, 1999), 79-80; Ali Rahnama, "Introduction," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival – Second Edition*, ed. Ali Rahnama (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 1; Bobby S Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism, and the Emergence of Islamism* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1997), 157.

<sup>162</sup> See: Roxanne L. Euben, "Mapping Modernities, "Islamic" and "Western"," in *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Fred Dallmayr (New York: Lexington Books, 1999): 11-37; Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shi'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century* New Edition (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005); Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, "Editor's Introduction: Contemporary Islamic Thought: One or Many?," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1-20; Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Introduction," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009): 1-48; Mehran Kamrava, ed. *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity: A Reader* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006).

packaged, and clearly divisible categories, these currents represent diverse, and at times contesting, philosophical, religious, social, political, and economic orientations. The categorization is nevertheless useful for comparing and contrasting some of the ways in which contemporary Muslim thinkers have addressed the question of modernity, and for highlighting their points of convergence and divergence. Arguably, despite being marked by major differences, these currents represent a continuous effort by post-nineteenth century Muslim thinkers to respond to the challenges of colonial modernity on the basis of their modern understandings of Islamic thought. After a brief examination of these three currents through a survey of the relevant academic literature, the chapter focuses on the neo-Shariati narrative of Shariati's place in modern Islamic thought and his particular encounter with the question of modernity.

### *ISLAMIC MODERNISM*

The nineteenth century encounter with colonial modernity led, in the words of one commentator, to a "deep soul-searching" in Muslim societies and an effort to identify and overcome the causes of decline.<sup>163</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of prominent Muslim thinkers began to call for the modernization of Islamic thought and the adoption of scientific, industrial, military and other achievements of Western modernity.<sup>164</sup> Indian Islamic scholar Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Iranian-born pan-Islamic ideologue Sayyid

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<sup>163</sup> Hunter, "Introduction," 13.

<sup>164</sup> Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 6. Also see: Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Forward," in Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), x.

Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897), Egyptian religious reformer Muhammad Abduh (1845-1905), Syrian Islamic jurist Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935), and Indian-born poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) are regarded as some of the most influential figures of Islamic modernism.<sup>165</sup> Despite a shared commitment to reviving and modernizing Islamic thought these Muslim modernists advanced radically different social and intellectual projects. For example, while Afghani was a passionate advocate of Muslim unity in resistance against British colonialism, Ahmad Khan strongly opposed the call for *jihad* against foreign occupiers and advocated political quietism or a general withdrawal from political affairs.<sup>166</sup>

The enterprise of reconciling Islam with a range of modern values and institutions, from modern reason and science/technology to constitutionalism and representative government, effectively distinguished Islamic modernism from both traditionalism and secular modernism. Unlike most traditionalists and secular modernists, Islamic modernists believed that far from being incompatible with modernity and modern rationality, Islam was an inherently rational religion.<sup>167</sup> Some Islamic modernists even held that Islam's rational and scientific spirit, which had once been manifested in the Islamic civilization, had in the course of

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<sup>165</sup> Some of the other major figures associated with Islamic modernism include Syrian writer and pan-Islamic activist Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (d. 1902), Indian Muslim scholars Chiragh Ali (d. 1895), Shibil Numani (d. 1914), Syed Amir Ali (d. 1928), and Mawlana Abu Kalam Azad (d. 1958), Egyptian Islamic thinkers Rifat al-Tahtawi (d. 1873), Qasim Amin (d. 1908), Muhammad Farid Wajdi (1954), and Ali Abdel Raziq (d. 1966), Turkish theologian Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960), and Iranian cleric Muhammad Hussein Naini (d. 1936).

<sup>166</sup> Ali Rahnema, "Introduction to 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: Contextualizing the Pioneers of Islamic Revival," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* – Second Edition, ed. Ali Rahnema (New York: Zed Books, 2005), xxxii.

<sup>167</sup> Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins*, 9. Also see: Ayoub, "Forward," x.

historical interactions been passed on to Europe and embodied in different aspects of European modernity.<sup>168</sup> As such, instead of seeing Islam or modernity as mutually exclusive categories, Islamic modernists sought to advance a critical, selective, and synthetic approach. This critical/selective approach also informed Islamic modernists' attitudes towards the West. While they believed in the necessity of adopting the scientific/technological achievements of modern Europe, Islamic modernists nevertheless wanted Muslim societies to modernize in their own way without taking the path of Westernization. In the face of Western technological, scientific, and military superiority and the state of stagnation and decline in Muslim societies, Islamic modernists sought to theorize the "options for renaissance" and change from within.<sup>169</sup> In this effort, Muslim modernists looked at the Western experience through a selective lens seeking to identify the positive and universal features of European modernity. This approach, based on selection and synthesis, is particularly evident in the modernist discourses of Afghani, Abduh, and Iqbal.

For Afghani, European colonial expansion in Muslim societies was a consequence of Europe's scientific and material advancement on the one hand, and centuries of intellectual stagnation in Muslim societies on the other.<sup>170</sup> He thus

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<sup>168</sup> Hunter, "Introduction," 15. For example, in 1883 in a letter to Ernest Renan, Afghani challenged the French philosopher and Orientalist's assertion that Arabs were inherently hostile to progress and scientific advancement and draws attention to the Arab and Muslim contributions to science and to Europe's rediscovery of neglected scientific and intellectual resources. See:

"Answer of Jamal ad-Din to Renan: Journal des Debates May 18, 1883," in Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 181-187.

<sup>169</sup> Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins*, 8.

<sup>170</sup> Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani quoted in Bassam Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam: A Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific-Technological Age*, trans., by Judith von Sivers (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 92.

argued that colonial Europe could provide Muslims with an example of achieving material success and superiority through technological and industrial advancement.<sup>171</sup> At the same time, in Afghani's view reversing the prevailing stagnation of the Islamic world and overcoming European colonial domination required a total reformation and reinterpretation of Islamic doctrines in accordance with the needs and challenges of the modern world.<sup>172</sup> Rejecting the idea that religion was responsible for the state of backwardness and decline, Afghani argued that Muslim traditions can be reformed and reoriented in accordance with the needs of Muslim societies faced with the modern challenge of European domination.<sup>173</sup>

According to Nikki Keddie, one of the foremost academic experts on Afghani, his simultaneous call for modernization, Muslim unity against imperialism, and Islamic reform, made Afghani's position an appealing third way between "pure traditionalism" and "blind imitation of the West."<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, Keddie also notes that despite his calls for religious reform and unity among Muslims, a considerable share of Afghani's political activism consisted of attempts at influencing the political ruling classes and the religious and political elites. According to her, the approach of Afghani and his followers was to "mobilize the masses' traditional and religious sentiments by stressing the

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<sup>171</sup> Jawid Iqbal, "Introduction," in *Kolliat-e Iqbal Lahori (The Poetry Collection of Iqbal Lahori)* (Tehran: Elham, 1384/2005), 20-21.

<sup>172</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, "Sayyid Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani'," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival – Second Edition*, ed. Ali Rahnema (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 12.

<sup>173</sup> Abdou Filali-Ansary, "Muslims and Democracy," in *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East*, ed. Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins U Press, 2003), 194.

<sup>174</sup> Keddie, "Sayyid Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani'," 12.

Western threat to Islam while emphasizing to the elite the need of modernizing reform of society and religion."<sup>175</sup>

After Afghani's death in 1897, his reformist efforts were continued by a number of his students and followers in various Muslim societies. One of Afghani's most prominent students was Muhammad Abduh, who is regarded as the founder of Islamic modernism in the Arab world.<sup>176</sup> Like Afghani, Abduh was critical of the traditionalist Ulama and called for the emancipation of Muslims from the chains of "imitation."<sup>177</sup> According to Euben, Abduh believed that rationalism was not only recognized by Islam, it was also encouraged and embraced in Islam's religious teachings. Abduh's thought, she argues, rejected the extreme positions of total acceptance or total rejection of Western modernity, and held "that modern reason and its fruits [were] universal inheritance consistent with, and supportive of, Islamic truths rightly interpreted."<sup>178</sup>

In the Indian sub-continent, it was Muhammad Iqbal who sought to advance Afghani's intellectual legacy and his modernist approach to Islam. In developing his own interpretation of Islamic thought, Iqbal made a case for reviving the religious practice of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), which refers to the application of individual reason to Islamic law independently of the views of traditional schools of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). For him, reviving the neglected

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<sup>175</sup> Keddie, "Sayyid Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani'," 17.

<sup>176</sup> Hunter, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>177</sup> Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shi'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century* New Edition (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005), 56.

<sup>178</sup> Roxanne L Euben, "Mapping Modernities, "Islamic" and "Western"," in *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Fred Dallmayr (New York: Lexington Books, 1999), 16.

principle of *ijtihad* was necessary in order to re-evaluate and recodify the entire body of Islamic thought and jurisprudence.<sup>179</sup> In his major work in Islamic philosophy, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930), Iqbal asserted that the critical task before "the modern Muslim" was "to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past."<sup>180</sup> For Iqbal, the project of rethinking Islamic religious thought was a prerequisite for sustained social and cultural change in Muslim societies. He argued that modern developments around the world had created "new cultural necessities, and, thus, Islamic jurisprudential reason, which the masses of people regard as the rule of Sharia, is now in need of revision."<sup>181</sup> Challenging the claims of the traditional Islamic Ulama about the finality of the historical schools of jurisprudence,<sup>182</sup> Iqbal argued that the historical contributions of earlier Muslim thinkers were only to be seen in light of the prevailing contextual particularities.<sup>183</sup> Appealing to the Quranic teaching that "life is a process of progressive creation," Iqbal argued that each generation "should be permitted to solve its own problems."<sup>184</sup> The task of rethinking and reconstructing Islamic thought for Iqbal meant developing a set of moral, social, and political ideals that corresponded to contemporary conditions and that were based on the "original simplicity and universality" of the

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<sup>179</sup> Riffat Hassan, "Islamic Modernist and Reformist Discourse in South Asia," in *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2008), 168.

<sup>180</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Ashraf, 1962), 97.

<sup>181</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, quoted in Jawid Iqbal, "Introduction," 24-25.

<sup>182</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 168.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.



monotheistic notions of "freedom, equality, and solidarity."<sup>185</sup> This radical rethinking also required reviving neglected aspects of Islamic thought such as *ijtihad* and *ijma* (consensus), which, in Iqbal's view, were particularly relevant in the modern world.<sup>186</sup>

The Islamic modernism of Afghani, Abduh, Iqbal, and others is often seen as having left a mixed legacy. According to Abu-Rabi, Islamic modernism sought to develop a new terminology to replace "the preindustrial and precapitalist notions and concepts of Muslim thought."<sup>187</sup> Islamic modernism is also credited with having initiated debates on various current issues including cultural identity, the relationship between Muslim societies and the West, the status of women, and political rights and freedoms. The intellectual legacy of Islamic modernism is also said to have paved the way for the subsequent rise of secular nationalist movements, as well as early women's emancipation movements.<sup>188</sup> On the other hand, however, commentators have also pointed to the defeats or failures of the modernist project during the early half of the twentieth century.<sup>189</sup> By the beginning of the century it was clear that Islamic modernism was not becoming a popular discourse of social change as Afghani, Abduh, Iqbal, and others may have envisioned. While the masses of people remained loyal to the traditional religious establishment and its predominantly theological interpretation of religious doctrines, the educated elites insisted on pursuing a project of Westernization of their societies through top-down modernization measures. In this context,

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<sup>185</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 156.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>187</sup> Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins*, 9.

<sup>188</sup> John Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 60.

<sup>189</sup> Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 53.

throughout the twentieth century the legacy of Islamic modernism was claimed and advanced by two distinct and contesting currents, namely Islamism and reformism.

### *ISLAMISM*

In the context of the expansion of European colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa, and the post-World War I dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the efforts of Islamic modernists to reconcile the particular experience of Muslim societies with the condition of the modern world paved the way for the emergence of the modern nation-state and the subsequent rise of secular nationalist movements.<sup>190</sup> Seeking to reverse the weakness of their respective societies vis-à-vis the modern West, modern Muslim nation-states and the secular nationalist elites began to advance a series of modernization programs on the basis of Western-centric models of development. While limited modernization measures had already begun in the nineteenth century, during the period between 1920s and 1970s, a number of Muslim states including Afghanistan, Turkey, Egypt, and Iran aggressively pursued a range of policies to adopt Western military, legal, educational, and economic institutions.<sup>191</sup>

The gradual emergence of Islamism in the first half of the twentieth century and its eventual intellectual and political ascendancy by the mid-century is attributed by a number of commentators to the failure in Muslim societies of both Islamic modernism and secular nationalism. For Abu-Rabi, for instance, the

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<sup>190</sup> See: Abu-Rabi, "Editor's Introduction: Contemporary Islamic Thought," 8; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 61.

<sup>191</sup> See: Hunter, "Introduction," 16; Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 30.

rise of Islamism was facilitated, among other factors, by the inability of Islamic modernism to achieve its initial vision of renaissance, and the failure of secular nationalist states to adequately address the challenges of the post-colonial era.<sup>192</sup> Similarly, another commentator links the mid-century attractiveness of Islamist discourses to "the inability of the secular elites, which succeeded the European colonial regimes, to meet the hopes and aspirations of their people."<sup>193</sup> According to Sayyid the inadequate integration of the new petty bourgeoisie in political and economic structures of the newly independent states in the Middle East and North Africa, the unevenness of economic development, and the effects of the cultural erosion of "Muslim identities" were major factors that contributed to the inception and augmentation of Islamist currents in the region.<sup>194</sup>

Challenging what they regarded as the disruptive effects of "Westernization" and the authoritarian modernization and secularization policies of modern Muslim states, various Islamist discourses began to emerge around the mid-twentieth century. These discourses often called for Islamic alternatives to modern philosophies and sociopolitical institutions.<sup>195</sup> Egyptian preacher and the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), Pakistani theologian Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979), Egyptian author and Muslim Brotherhood member Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), Iranian religious and political

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<sup>192</sup> Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, "Editor's Introduction: Islamism from the Standpoint of Critical Theory," in *Contemporary Arab Reader on Political Islam*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (London and Edmonton: Pluto Press and U of Alberta Press, 2010), ix.

<sup>193</sup> Bobby S Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1997), 19.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 18-22. Also see: Michael Fischer, "Islam and the Revolt of Petit Bourgeoisie," *Daedalus* 3, no. 1 (1982): 101-122.

<sup>195</sup> Rahnema, "Introduction," 2.

leader Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989), and Indian Islamic scholar Abul Hassan Ali Nadwi (1913-1999), are regarded as some of the major figures of mid-twentieth century Islamism.<sup>196</sup> Some of the prominent contemporary Islamists include Iran's current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (b. 1939), Sudanese religious leader and founder of Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood Hassan al-Turabi (b. 1932), Egyptian theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), and Tunisian politician Rashid al-Ghannushi (b. 1941). Like Islamic modernism, Islamism is also characterized as much by continuities and overlaps as it is by diversity and difference. As a result, within the academic literature commentators often distinguish between various forms of Islamism: non-violent and violent, democratic and non-democratic, moderate and extreme.<sup>197</sup>

In their attempts to identify alternatives to Western modernity, Islamist thinkers have used Islam as the "master signifier" and the "unifying point" of their discursive production.<sup>198</sup> As a master signifier, Islam has come to represent "the authentic characteristic of the collective 'self' in opposition to the European 'other'."<sup>199</sup> In practice, however, the claim to authenticity and the project of identifying an authentically Islamic epistemology as the basis of an Islamic

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<sup>196</sup> Commentators also name Iranian cleric and politician Morteza Motahhari (d. 1979), Iraqi Shi'a cleric Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr (d. 1980), Egyptian cleric Mohammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996), Egyptian activist and founder of Muslim Women's Association Zainab al-Ghazali (d. 2005), and Lebanese cleric Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (d. 2010) among other major Islamist thinkers of recent decades. Moreover a wide range of political organizations representing a diversity of policies and methods are often associated with Islamism. Some of these include the Muslim Brotherhood and the Al-Nour Party in Egypt, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

<sup>197</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "The Modernization of Islam or the Islamization of Modernity," in *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Routledge Curzon Press, 1999), 83. Also see: Abu-Rabi, "Editor's Introduction: Islamism from the Standpoint of Critical Theory," xiii-xiv.

<sup>198</sup> Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, 158.

<sup>199</sup> Abu Zayd, "The Modernization of Islam," 79-80.

modernization has primarily meant advocating the establishment of an Islamic state and the implementation of Islamic law.<sup>200</sup> While leading Muslim modernists such as Ali Abdel Raziq (1888-1966) argued that the Quran and the Islamic tradition did not endorse any particular form of government,<sup>201</sup> Islamists like Nadwi, al-Banna, and Maududi saw the reign of Prophet Mohammad and the first four caliphs as a governance model to be restored in the modern age. Nadwi traced the beginning of the Islamic stagnation to what he saw as the "de facto separation between religion and state" after the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate in 661 AD.<sup>202</sup> For Al-Banna, the founding of an Islamic state and the rule of Islamic law was the only way to revive Muslim societies and to resist Western political, economic, and cultural domination.<sup>203</sup> Maududi too believed that it was obligatory for Muslims to strive to establish a state committed to the implementation of Islamic Sharia.<sup>204</sup> Arguably, however, the most detailed and forceful accounts of the Islamic state were developed by Qutb in his theory of the absolute sovereignty of God, and by Khomeini in his theorization of the doctrine of the guardianship of the jurist (*velayat-e faqih*).

Qutb's Islamist account was developed in his later works, particularly in *Milestones (ma'alim fi al-tariq)*, published in 1964.<sup>205</sup> There, he used the Quranic term *jahiliyya* (barbarism or ignorance) to describe the modern condition in Egypt

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<sup>200</sup> Abu Zayd, "The Modernization of Islam," 82. Also see: Euben and Zaman, "Introduction," 27.

<sup>201</sup> Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam*, 45.

<sup>202</sup> Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins*, 18.

<sup>203</sup> Rahnama, "Introduction to 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition," 4.

<sup>204</sup> Abul Ala Maududi, *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, ed. and trans. Khurshid Ahmad (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1960) 177, quoted in Euben and Zaman, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>205</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, trans., Jon Rothschild (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 13.

and around the world. While in the Quran the term generally refers to the condition of pre-Islamic Arabia, in Maududi and Qutb's political thought *jahiliyya* came to represent the sovereignty of the individual and the rejection of divine authority.<sup>206</sup> Describing the post-colonial Egyptian state as an instrument for preserving the sovereignty of Gamal Abdel Nasser's totalitarian rule, Qutb called for the establishment of a new political order based on the absolute sovereignty of God and Islamic Sharia.<sup>207</sup> In his view, the restoration of divine sovereignty required a committed Muslim vanguard whose tasks included developing social programs on the basis of Islamic law. Thus, in *Milestones* he called on the Muslim vanguard to eliminate the reign of man and to establish the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>208</sup>

Khomeini is regarded as the first Islamist to have both articulated and implemented his idea of the Islamic state.<sup>209</sup> For centuries, the Shi'i Ulama had deferred the founding of an Islamic state to the return of Muhammad al-Mahdi (b. 869), the last Shi'i Imam who is believed to have been in occultation (*ghaybah*) since the late ninth century. It was believed that until the return of the hidden Imam, the role of the Shi'i jurists was to provide believers with religious guidance, oversee religious practices, and collect and distribute religious taxes (*khums*) from and among the believers on behalf of the Imam. In a radical reformulation of this traditional Shi'i clerical doctrine, Khomeini argued that in

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<sup>206</sup> Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 53-55.

<sup>207</sup> Euben, "Mapping Modernities," 20. Also see: Charles Tripp, "Sayyid Qutb: The Political Vision," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnema (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 154-183.

<sup>208</sup> Sayed Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 169.

<sup>209</sup> Baqer Moin, "Khomeini's Search for Perfection: Theory and Reality," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* – Second Edition, ed. Ali Rahnema (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 64.

the absence of the hidden Imam the deputyship of the Ulama extended to all facets of social and political life.<sup>210</sup> From his first book, *Secrets Unveiled (kashf al-asrar)*, published in 1944, through his 1970 book, *Guardianship of the Jurist (velayat-e faqih)*, Khomeini introduced and expanded on the notion of a theocratic state. His views in *Secrets Unveiled* resembled Qutb's arguments in his later works especially in *Milestones*. There, Khomeini argued that sovereignty only belonged to God and in the absence of prophetic authority the most important qualification for political leadership was knowledge of the Islamic law. Like Qutb, Khomeini also rejected the idea of human legislation. According to Khomeini, under the leadership of the guardian-jurist the state is only subject to "conditions that are set forth in the Noble Quran and the *Sunna* of the Most Noble Messenger."<sup>211</sup> However, critics note that Khomeini took a different position after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, by arguing that the authority of the state transcends the provisions of Islamic law and that the state was the final arbiter of the interest of Islam.<sup>212</sup>

Highlighting its anti-democratic and anti-rationalist features, some critics see Islamism as a rejection of "the dominant features of modernity."<sup>213</sup> Critics also describe Islamists' claims of authenticity as a position against the universality

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<sup>210</sup> Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 158.

<sup>211</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini (1981), 55, quoted in Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Islam/Muslims and Political Leadership," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Leadership*, ed. Joseph Masciulli, Mikhail A. Molchanov, and W. Andy Knight (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 296.

<sup>212</sup> Euben and Zaman, "Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini," 160.

<sup>213</sup> Nilüfer Göle, "Snapshots of Islamic Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1, *Multiple Modernities* (Winter, 2000), 92-93.

of modern norms and structures.<sup>214</sup> However, as Abu-Rabi correctly points out, while Islamism claims or hopes "to replace modernity ... with an Islamic *Weltanschauung*," it would be a mistake to "juxtapose Islamism and modernity or [to] argue in binary terms" because the former's emergence in the Muslim world in recent decades was itself facilitated by modernity.<sup>215</sup> Similarly, Tibi argues that the formulation of the concept of an "Islamic Republic" in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution in Iran points to the negotiation between modern and traditional concepts in Islamist thought. According to Tibi, while Islamist discourses that claim "authenticity" can generally be termed "defensive-cultural mechanisms," they are nevertheless modern discourses which display varying degrees of hybridity and engagement with modern Western thought.<sup>216</sup>

Like the late nineteenth century modernists, the mid-twentieth century Islamist thinkers called on Muslims to pursue scientific and technological advancement.<sup>217</sup> Like modernists, Islamists also criticized the traditional Ulama for their fixation on religious rituals, their inattentiveness to the needs of the modern world, and their political quietism. Maududi, among others, was highly critical of the Ulama's preoccupation with "ritual practices ... at the expense of 'the real spirit of the religion'."<sup>218</sup> Qutb too saw the traditional Ulama as "opportunists" who transform religion into a profession, manipulate religious texts to serve their own material interests, and, in so doing, paralyzed and deceive

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<sup>214</sup> Aziz Al-Azmeh. *Islams and Modernities* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 92.

<sup>215</sup> Abu-Rabi, "Editor's Introduction: Islamism from the Standpoint of Critical Theory," xi.

<sup>216</sup> Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam*, 6.

<sup>217</sup> Euben, "Mapping Modernities", 21; Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins*, 20.

<sup>218</sup> Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi" in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 81.



Muslims 'in the name of religion'.<sup>219</sup> Similarly, Khomeini believed that the message of political quietism, passive piety, and purely devotional religiosity of traditionalists was not only welcomed but also actively supported by imperialist forces in Iran.<sup>220</sup> Condemning the political quietism of "pseudo-saints" who aided imperialist domination, Khomeini called on the youth to "strip them of their turbans."<sup>221</sup>

The rise of Islamism is also said to have facilitated the social and political participation of many Muslims in the modern world. Even critics acknowledge that by challenging the "traditional subjugation of Muslim identity" and the "monocivilizational impositions of Western modernity," Islamism has served as "a critical introduction of Muslim agency into the modern arenas of social life."<sup>222</sup> According to Göle, as a contemporary phenomenon that simultaneously seeks continuity with and breaks from the past, Islamism provides Muslims with a sense of collective agency, a modern political vocabulary, and the means for participation and communication in "urban and public spaces of modernity."<sup>223</sup> Moreover, Abu-Rabi describes Islamism as "a powerful source of critical debate in the struggle against the undemocratic imposition of a new world order by the

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<sup>219</sup> Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Sayyid Qutb," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 133.

<sup>220</sup> Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 161.

<sup>221</sup> Euben and Zaman, "Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini," 160-161.

<sup>222</sup> Göle, "Snapshots of Islamic Modernities," 93.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

United States, and against the economic and ecological violence of neo-liberalism."<sup>224</sup>

### *REFORMISM*

While Islamism's advocacy of the Islamic state and Sharia law as an alternative to Enlightenment modernity constituted a conservative turn in the evolution of modern Islamic thought, the mid- and late-twentieth century also witnessed the emergence of a number of reformist discourses aimed at continuing the progressive legacies of early modernists like Afghani, Abduh, and Iqbal. In addition to Ali Shariati, whose ideas will be discussed at length in the next section, some of the most prominent twentieth century Muslim reformers include Sudanese Muslim thinker Mahmoud Mohammad Taha (1909-1985), Iranian theologian Mahmoud Taleghani (1911-1979), Algerian-French scholar of Islamic studies Mohammed Arkoun (1928-2010), and Egyptian Quranic scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943-2010). Among the leading contemporary Muslim reformists are, Moroccan feminist and sociologist Fatima Mernissi (b. 1940), Egyptian-American Muslim feminist Leila Ahmed (b. 1940), Turkish author and educator Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941), Iranian dissident intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1945), and UK-based Swiss academic Tariq Ramadan (b. 1962).<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Abu-Rabi, "Editor's Introduction: Islamism from the Standpoint of Critical Theory," vii.

<sup>225</sup> Other prominent Islamic reformists include Iranian scholar and political activist Mehdi Bazargan (1907-1995), Indian-born Islamic scholar Fazlur Rahman Malik (1919-1988), Tunisian Islamic thinker Mohamed Talbi (b. 1921), Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi (b. 1935), Syrian intellectual Muhammad Shahrur (b. 1938), Sudanese-American Islamic and legal scholar Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (b. 1950), American Muslim feminist Amina Wadud (b. 1952), Malaysian political scientist and human rights activist Chandra Muzaffar (b. 1947), and a number of Iranian reformist clerics such as Mohsen Kadivar (b. 1951), Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari (b. 1950), Mohammad Mojtaba Shabestari (b. 1936). Commentators have also pointed to a number of organizations and political parties which are either led by prominent reformist figures or inspired

Like Islamism, Islamic reformism constitutes a wide range of religious, philosophical, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic views within modern Islamic political thought.<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, the common denominator between the distinct variations of reformism (and one which connects reformism to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernism) is the rejection of the mutually exclusive binary of Islam and modernity, and the attempt to advance a discourse of indigenous modernity on the basis of mutual recognition and synthesis.

In the context of the mid-twentieth century Muslim societies, Islamic reformism emerged not only as a challenge to Eurocentric modernism and Islamic traditionalism, but also as a radical critique of Islamism. While Maududi, Qutb, Khomeini, and other leading twentieth century Islamists called for the establishment of an Islamic state based on the absolute sovereignty of God and the rule of the Islamic Sharia, their reformist counterparts including Taleghani, Bazargan, and Taha advocated a humanist interpretation of Islam and rejected the predominantly authoritarian and statist Islamist interpretation of Islam's religious doctrines. Taleghani, a highly regarded senior Shi'i cleric who died shortly after the 1979 revolution, supported democratic governance and was critical of the turn

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by reformist discourses. Some of these include the Nationalist-Religious Coalition of Iran, the Gulen Movement in Turkey and Central Asia, the Justice and Development Party in Turkey and Morocco, and the Egyptian Center Party.

<sup>226</sup> In *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (1998) Charles Kurzman uses the category of Islamic liberalism to refer to a wide range of Muslim thinkers from prominent modernist of the previous generation such as Ali Abdel Raziq to contemporary reformists such as Fatima Mernissi, Mohamed Talbi, Yousuf al-Qaradawi, Mohammed Arkoun, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, and Abdul-Karim Soroush. Kurzman's volume also includes selected works by Ali Shariati and Muhammad Iqbal. In "Post-Islamist Trends in Post-Revolutionary Iran," Mojtaba Mahdavi uses post-Islamism to describe the "various forms of Muslim reformist trends in post-revolutionary Iran." According to Mahdavi, while post-Islamists seek a public presence for religion in the modern social and political life, they nevertheless reject the Islamist concept of the Islamic state. See: Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Post-Islamist Trends in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011), 95.

toward authoritarian Islamism in post-revolutionary Iran. Bazargan, who served as Iran's first post-revolution Prime Minister (from February 1979 to November 1979), was also critical of Khomeini's statist and authoritarian interpretation of Islam and argued that the idea of the absolute guardianship of the Islamic jurist was tantamount to religious despotism.<sup>227</sup> Taha too rejected the implementation of Sharia law in Sudan and challenged the traditionalist interpretation of Islamic doctrines. Taha's position was harshly criticized by the advocates of traditionalism and Islamism and he was eventually charged with heresy and executed in 1985 during the presidency of Gaafar Nimeiry.<sup>228</sup>

The question of the relationship between Islam and modernity has been one of the central preoccupations of Islamic reformism since the mid-twentieth century and continues to be discussed and debated by a range of contemporary Muslim reformers. In their analysis of this relationship, leading reformists of the late twentieth century such as Abu Zayd and Arkoun challenged the Orientalist and Islamist claims about the incompatibility of Islam and modernity and the inherently European nature of the latter. In making a case for the compatibility of Islam and modernity, both of these reformists drew attention to two distinct but interrelated points. On the one hand, citing the intellectual legacy of the Mu'tazila movement (a rationalist school of theology in Islamic thought which came to prominence between the eighth and eleventh centuries) and of Muslim rationalists such as Al-Jahiz (781-868/9), Al-Kindi (801-873), Razi (866-925), Al-Farabi

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<sup>227</sup> Mehdi Moslemi, *Factional Politics in post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 14.

<sup>228</sup> See: Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, "The Islamic Law of Apostasy and Its Modern Applicability: A Case from the Sudan," *Religion* 16, no. 3 (1986): 197-224.

(872-950), Al-Tawhidi (923-1023), Ibn Miskawayh (932-1030), Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980-1037), and others, these reformists highlighted a tradition of Islamic rationalism and its contributions to the European Enlightenment thought. On the other hand, however, in their critique of scientific positivism and the binary construction of reason and revelation, they distinguished Islam's rationalist tradition from that of Enlightenment rationality. Arkoun, for instance, believed that unlike the "neutral," "cold," and "calculating" rationality of the Aristotelian reason, Islamic reason was a creative force oriented towards and in response to everyday challenges.<sup>229</sup> He called for a critical reengagement with Islamic reason and argued for the necessity of finding a third way between the "abstract rationalism" of Enlightenment's scientific positivism and the dogmatism and conservatism of traditional theology.<sup>230</sup> Abu Zayd made a similar point by arguing that contrary to Greek philosophy that only recognized reason and logos, the history of Islamic philosophy was characterized by an effort to bring together reason and revelation and to "upgrade the meaning of revelation to meet the findings of reason."<sup>231</sup>

Among the leading contemporary advocates of the compatibility of Islam and modernity, Gülen argues that the traditional Islamic principle of the absolute sovereignty of God does not contradict the modern principle of popular

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<sup>229</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, "Naghd-e aghl-e eslami va mafhoom-e khoda" ("The Critique of Islamic Reason and the Concept of God"), interview with Hashim Salih, trans. Mehdi Khalaji, *Kian* 27, Khordad-Tir 1378/June-July 1999, 22.

<sup>230</sup> See: Mohammed Arkoun, "Positivism and Tradition in an Islamic Perspective: Kemalism," *Diogenes* 32, no. 127 (1984): 82-100.

<sup>231</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "The Other as Mirror of Selfunderstanding. Comparing Two Traditions," *Rreset DOC: Dialogues on Civilizations*, 18 July 2011, <http://www.rresetdoc.org/story/00000021674> (accessed 4 August 2012).

sovereignty. According to Gülen, since sovereignty has been entrusted to humans by God people are "free to make choice with regard to their social and political actions."<sup>232</sup> While rejecting the notion of the Islamic state and endorsing a secular model of governance, Gülen nevertheless calls for an active role for religion in social, ethical, educational, and intellectual realms.<sup>233</sup> He also favors the reinterpretation of Sharia in accordance with the modern principles of human rights and freedom. In his view, a revisited and reinterpreted Sharia could present "higher principles" to guide the community in addition to "laws made by humans."<sup>234</sup>

Another leading voice of contemporary Islamic reformism, Soroush also argues for the compatibility of "reason and faith," and "spiritual authority and political liberty."<sup>235</sup> In Soroush's view, modernity marks a set of changes as a result of which human beings turn from "passive objects" in a fixed and predetermined world into "active subjects" who can transform the world.<sup>236</sup> In this view, the pre-modern age is defined by "the hegemony of metaphysical thought in political, economic, and social realms." Modernity, it is argued,

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<sup>232</sup> Fethullah Gülen, "An Interview with Fethullah Gülen," interview and translation by Zeki Saritoprak and Ali Unal, *The Muslim World* 95, no. 3, 453, quoted in John Esposito and Ihsan Yilmaz, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gllen Movement Initiatives* (New York: Blue Dome, 2010), 31.

<sup>233</sup> Abu-Rabi, "Editor's Introduction," in Sevindi, Nevva, *Contemporary Islamic Conversations: M. Fethullah Gulen on Turkey, Islam, and the West*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, trans. Abdulah T. Antepli (New York: State University of New York, 2008), xi-xii. Also see: John Esposito and Ihsan Yilmaz, *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gllen Movement Initiatives* (New York: Blue Dome, 2010), 33-36.

<sup>234</sup> Gülen, "An Interview," 450.

<sup>235</sup> Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, "Introduction," in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xi.

<sup>236</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush, "The Sense and Essence of Secularism," in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54.

secularized politics by subjecting the state to "criticism, checks, and balances."<sup>237</sup> For Soroush, the modern secular state, then, is "a regime in whose polity no values and rules are beyond human appraisal and verification and in which no protocol, status, position, or ordinance is above public scrutiny." Soroush nevertheless critiques the exclusion of God in Western liberal thought and argues that the main challenge for contemporary Muslim societies is to make politics "desacralized," "rational," and "scientific" without antagonizing religion.<sup>238</sup> Thus, while rejecting the theory of *velayat-e faqih*,<sup>239</sup> Soroush nevertheless remains hopeful about the possibility of a "democratic religious government" in the context of contemporary Muslim societies.<sup>240</sup>

### **Locating Shariati in Modern Islamic Thought**

Commentators often disagree about Shariati's place in contemporary Islamic thought. In line with the reading of Shariati's thought as a counter-modern revolutionary ideology of Islamic authenticity, a number of commentators have drawn parallels between Shariati's views and the teachings of prominent twentieth

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<sup>237</sup> Soroush, "The Sense and Essence of Secularism," 59-60.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>240</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush, "The Idea of Democratic Religious Government," in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 122. Soroush writes: "The problem of religious democratic governments is threefold: to reconcile people's satisfaction with God's approval; to strike a balance between the religious and the nonreligious; and to do right by both the people and by God, acknowledging at once the integrity of human beings and of religion."

century Islamists.<sup>241</sup> According to Bayat, for instance, Shariati adopted concepts that had been developed by Islamist thinkers such as Maududi and Qutb to describe the condition of modernity and "in order to lash out at Western liberalism, secular nationalism and imperialism." For Bayat, Shariati's call for a "return to self" reflected the "Islamists' choice of Islam as an indigenous and all-embracing human alternative."<sup>242</sup> Similarly, Hunter argues that Shariati "expressed views similar to those of Qutb regarding the despiritualizing and alienating aspects of modern socioeconomic systems,"<sup>243</sup> and suggests that his emphasis on the leadership of the revolutionary vanguard may have helped to advance the theory of *velayat-e faqih* in post-revolutionary Iran.<sup>244</sup>

Others, however, distinguish Shariati's project from contemporaneous Islamist discourses.<sup>245</sup> Enayat, for example, regards Shariati as one of the most prominent voices of Shi'i modernism.<sup>246</sup> Examining contemporary Islamic

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<sup>241</sup> See: Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2005): 891-908; Forough Jahanbakhsh, *Islam, Democracy and Religious Modernism in Iran (1953-2000)*:

*From Bazargan to Soroush* (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2001).

<sup>242</sup> Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," 895. Also see: Asef Bayat, "Is there a Future for Islamist Revolutions?: Religion, Revolt, and Middle Eastern Modernity," in *Revolution in the Making of the Modern World: Social Identities, Globalization, and Modernity*, ed. John Foran, David Lane, Andreja Zivkovic (New York: Routledge, 2008), 100-101.

<sup>243</sup> Hunter, "Introduction," 7, 18-19.

<sup>244</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, "Islamic Reformist Discourses in Iran: Proponents and Prospects," in *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2008), 50.

<sup>245</sup> See: Charles Kurzman ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, "Contentious Public Religion: Two Conceptions of Islam in Revolutionary Iran Ali Shariati and Abdolkarim Soroush," *International Sociology* 19, no. 4 (December 2004): 504-523; Shahrugh Akhavi, "Islam, Politics and Society in the Thought of Ayatullah Khomeini, Ayatullah Taliqani and Ali Shariati," *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 4 (October 1988): 404-431; Mojtaba Mahdavi, "radikalism az do didgah: gofteman-e kelasik va noradikalism-e shariati" ("Radicalism from Two Perspectives: The Classical Discourse and Shariati's Neo-Radicalism"), in *Ghoghnoos-e ssian: revaiati digar az andisheh doktor Shariati (The Rebellious Phoenix: Another Account of the Thought of Dr. Shariati)*, ed. Amir Rezaei, (Tehran: Ghasidehsara, 2002), 237-264.

<sup>246</sup> Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 123.



political discourses in Iran, Mahdavi too differentiates the "Islamist" discourses of Khomeini and his followers from the "post-Islamist" discourses of Shariati, Soroush, Kadivar, Mojtabeh Shabestari and other Iranian Muslim reformists. In Mahdavi's view, while both discourses support an active role for religion in public social and political life, post-Islamism departs from Islamism by rejecting the concept of the Islamic state and the rule of Sharia law.<sup>247</sup> Mahdavi further distinguishes Shariati from other of post-Islamist thinkers by arguing that "the core of Shariati's discourse is about freedom and democracy without capitalism, social justice and socialism without authoritarianism, and modern spirituality without organized religion and clericalism."<sup>248</sup>

As the chief representatives of Shariati's intellectual legacy in post-revolutionary Iran, neo-Shariatis have also objected to the equation of Shariati's project with the projects of Maududi, Qutb, and Khomeini. According to Ehsan Shariati, for instance, far from embracing the Islamist project, Shariati's radical critique of authoritarianism and cultural essentialism provides a vantage point for his intellectual followers through which to challenge the Islamist ascendancy in post-revolutionary Iran.<sup>249</sup> Among other leading neo-Shariatis, Reza Alijani too believes that Shariati did not advocate for the establishment of an Islamic state, and that no reference in support of such a concept can be found in his work. He

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<sup>247</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Post-Islamist Trends in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011), 95-96.

<sup>248</sup> Mahdavi, "Post-Islamist Trends," 103.

<sup>249</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Talfigh dar projeh: goftegoo ba Ehsan Shariati dar bareh haghghat va nakami 'demokrasy motahed,'" (Synthesis in Project: Interview with Ehsan Shariati about the Promise and the Failure of 'Guided Democracy'), interview with Parvin Bakhtiar-Nejad, *Shargh*, 24 Tir 1386/15 July 2007, [http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=443#post\\_1997](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=443#post_1997) (accessed 20 May 2012).

rejects the suggestion that the rise of Islamism and the notion of an Islamic state in pre-revolution Iran were due to the influence of Shariati's Islamic discourse. In his view, it would be more accurate to say that Shariati began his project of radical religious reform at a time when Islamist discourses were already on the rise. Aljani points out that the only occasion when Shariati makes an explicit reference to the notion of the "religious state" is in a piece titled "Toynbee: Civilization-Religion" (CW 22: *Religion vs. Religion*) where Shariati rejects the idea and describes it as a particularly oppressive form of social and political tyranny.<sup>250</sup> Similarly, Susan Shariati argues that Shariati's discourse contains a radical critique of cultural essentialism and identitarianism which characterizes Islamic politics in Iran and other Muslim societies. According to Susan Shariati, while Islamist discourses define local cultural identity as an idealized and monolithic entity and as the anti-thesis of the non-Islamic "Western" other, Shariati essentially rejects the view of identity as a fixed and monolithic entity. She believes that while Shariati draws attention to the uniqueness and difference of each identity claim, he nevertheless regards identity as being in constant interaction and tension with the other and in a dynamic process of becoming. In her view, it is precisely this dialogical relation between the universal and the particular that informs the call for return to the self in the project of indigenous modernity. Far from being a call to identitarianism, she argues, Shariati's project is an invitation to attend to the dialogical relation between the particular and the

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<sup>250</sup> Reza Aljani, interview by author (Internet/Skype), 20 November 2012.

universal, and a deconstruction of traditional views on identity.<sup>251</sup> Sara Shariati too rejects the designation of Shariati's discourse as a discourse of identitarianism along the lines of Islamist calls for a return to an authentic traditional self. According to her, while Shariati calls for the re-visiting and restructuring of cultural identity in Muslim societies as a response to the particular colonial and post-colonial condition of Western hegemony and cultural alienation, his discourse, like Fanon's, places a much greater emphasis on the condition of human emancipation and the challenges of a common humanity.<sup>252</sup>

For neo-Shariatis, Shariati was one of the pioneers of the discourse of religious reform in Iran along with such prominent twentieth century Iranian Muslim reformists as Taleghani and Bazargan. In distinguishing Shariati's Islamic discourse from Islamist discourses and their call for an Islamic alternative to modernity, neo-Shariatis make a case that by advancing a discourse of indigenous modernity Shariati sought to revive and continue a project which had been initiated a century earlier by Afghani and expanded on in the early twentieth century by Iqbal. By highlighting the triumvirate projects of Afghani-Iqbal-Shariati, neo-Shariatis seek, on the one hand, to locate Shariati within a progressive and reform-oriented current in modern Islamic thought, and on the other hand, to highlight a sustained effort by religious reformers since the nineteenth century encounter with colonial modernity to go beyond the prevailing

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<sup>251</sup> Susan Shariati, "Protestantism va fahm-e Shariati az aan: goftegooy-e Susan Shariati va Taghi Rahmani" ("Protestantism and Shariati's Understanding of It: A Conversation between Susan Shariati and Taghi Rahmani"), interview with Lotfollah Meisami, *Cheshmendaaz Iran* 65, Day-Bahman 1389/January-February 2011, <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=472> (accessed 17 September 2012).

<sup>252</sup> Sara Shariati, interview by author (telephone), 29 November 2012.

traditionalism-modernism binary. As such, one neo-Shariati figure refers to the Afghani-Iqbal-Shariati triad as the trajectory of a radical religious reform approach in contemporary Islamic thought which combines "anti-colonialism" and "anti-despotism" with a new interpretation of religious doctrines in order to advance a contextually grounded discourse of cultural, social, and political change.<sup>253</sup> Similarly, Ehsan Shariati argues that by following the reformist paths of Afghani and Iqbal, Shariati sought to continue a contextually negotiated project of "religious reform, renewal, and renaissance."<sup>254</sup> Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari too traces the foundations of Shariati's project of "indigenous modernity" to Iqbal's effort to deconstruct and develop a synthesis of modern and Islamic thought through a simultaneous and radical critique of both.<sup>255</sup>

To assess the neo-Shariati reading of Shariati's Islamic discourse as a continuation of the religious-reform projects of Afghani and Iqbal, the remainder of this section will focus on Shariati's engagement with the ideas of these two pioneering Muslim modernists. In particular, the following discussion seeks to highlight what Shariati sees as the capacities of modern Islamic thought (especially as articulated by Afghani and Iqbal) for advancing indigenous visions of modern and progressive social and political development in post-colonial Muslim societies. Whereas some commentators have argued that the quest for articulating an indigenous account of modernity in Islamic thought has begun

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<sup>253</sup> Hossein Mesbahian, "Jamehe bi armaan morde ast" ("A Society without Ideals is a Society without Hope"), *Shargh* 1497, 19 Farvardin 1391/7 April 2012, 26-29, <http://old.sharghdaily.ir/pdf/91-01-19/vijeh/29.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2012).

<sup>254</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Rah-e Shariati" ("Shariati's Way"), *Jaras*, 10 Tir 1390/1 July 2011, <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/38930> (accessed 14 November 2011).

<sup>255</sup> Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Ma va miras-e Shariati" ("Us and Shariati's Legacy"), (1385/2006), [http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=439#post\\_2222](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=439#post_2222) (accessed 11 October 2011).

only with contemporary reformists such as Arkoun, Abu Zayd, Soroush, and Gülen,<sup>256</sup> Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought by neo-Shariatis point to an alternative genealogy of indigenous modernity that begins with the initial encounter with colonial modernity in Muslim societies in the late nineteenth century.

#### *SHARIATI: THE GENEALOGY OF INDIGENOUS MODERNITY IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT*

In the fifth volume of his thirty-six volume collected works, entitled *Iqbal and Us (ma va eghbal)* (1976), Shariati provides an outline of the Afghani-Iqbal project as a contextually grounded discourse of modernity for Muslim societies.<sup>257</sup> Distinguishing the socially and politically oriented discourses of Afghani and Iqbal from the quietist and apolitical discourses of Indian modernist Syed Ahmad Khan and his followers, Shariati argues that Ahmad Khan mistakenly believed that "Islamic revival would be possible simply through philosophical reasoning and a modern, scientific, rational, twentieth century interpretation of Islamic beliefs and Quranic teachings, irrespective of the prevailing social conditions, which included continued British imperialism."<sup>258</sup> The radical and anti-colonial discourses of Afghani and Iqbal, on the other hand, are seen by Shariati as efforts to transcend the confines of theological, philosophical, and metaphysical debates

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<sup>256</sup> See: Hunter, "Introduction," xx, 13; Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11.

<sup>257</sup> Ali Shariati, *Iqbal and Us: Collected Works 5 (Ma va Iqbal: majmooeh asaar 5)*, (Aachen, Germany: Hosseinieh Ershad, 1978), 25, 116.

<sup>258</sup> Shariati, *Iqbal and Us*, 34.

and to address the prevailing social and political conditions and challenges.<sup>259</sup> Shariati also distinguishes the discourses of Afghani and Iqbal from the authoritarian discourses of social and political change which sought to "radically alter norms and beliefs and reorganize social relations and ways of human upbringing through the force of compulsion and domination."<sup>260</sup>

Shariati praises both Afghani and Iqbal for challenging the myth of Europe as "the universal trajectory of progress and the most complete vision of human ideals and values."<sup>261</sup> He, nevertheless, distinguishes the Islamic discourses of these Muslim modernists from traditionalist and culturalist discourses that advocated a "dogmatic, backwards, and racist turns to the past." According to Shariati, without denying the achievements of Europe, Afghani and Iqbal drew attention to the diversity of civilizational traditions. They challenged the monocivilizational discourse of European modernity and saw Islamic and European traditions as two connected entities that mutually influenced one another in the course of ongoing historical interactions. Thus, Shariati contends, even though Afghani and Iqbal were concerned with the sociopolitical and cultural consequences of European colonialism, they nevertheless acknowledged the transformative potential of the modern normative and intellectual changes, which the European Renaissance and Reformation exemplified.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Shariati, *Iqbal and Us*, 53.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 74.

If Afghani is credited with initiating the post-colonial project of turning away from Europe,<sup>263</sup> Iqbal is recognized for giving "ideological sustenance" to Afghani's project and for pointing in the direction of alternative philosophical and sociopolitical models on the basis of a reconstructed religious worldview.<sup>264</sup> Iqbal's reconstruction of Islamic thought is described as a project of returning to and reexamining the local cultural and intellectual resources, identifying their capacities, and utilizing those capacities toward advancing a project of change and renewal.<sup>265</sup> According to Shariati, Iqbal's work provided a blueprint for transforming Islam from a "static and stagnant" culture of hopelessness, determinism, and concern with the afterlife, into a change-oriented, future-oriented, and this-worldly vision of existence.<sup>266</sup> In his view, unlike Western-centric and secular ideologies that had little influence on the religious masses, Iqbal's indigenous ideology aimed to "awaken Muslims" precisely by drawing on the familiar/local cultural and civilizational resources.<sup>267</sup> He argues that by developing a modern and contextually negotiated ideology of social and political development on the basis of the restructuring of Islamic thought, Iqbal showed the

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<sup>263</sup> Shariati sees Afghani as the pioneer of a movement that sought not only to liberate the national self from a politically and economically dominating other, but also to challenge the savage colonial modernity which sought to deny and obliterate all other cultures and civilizations. He argues that Afghani's call for turning away from the West came approximately a century before the provincialization of Europe by such prominent twentieth century anti-colonial figures as Indian philosopher and politician Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), Kenyan independence leader Jomo Kenyatta (1889-1978), Senegalese independence leader Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001), Ghanaian independence leader Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), Guinean independence leader Ahmed Sékou Touré (1922-1984), Tanzanian independence leader Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), Martinique-born French revolutionary intellectual Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) and Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), Algerian novelist and political activist Kateb Yacine (1929-1989), and Tunisian-French essayist and intellectual Albert Memmi (b. 1920). See: Shariati, *Iqbal and Us*, 79-85.

<sup>264</sup> Shariati, *Iqbal and Us*, 28, 142, 180.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 12.

continued relevance of religious thought in the intellectual and philosophical debates of the modern age.<sup>268</sup>

Building on the modernist interpretations of Afghani and Iqbal, Shariati too argues for the compatibility of religious revelation with human reason and individual will and agency. According to Shariati, instead of emphasizing "divine destiny" in which the individual will is entirely inconsequential the Quran emphasizes "human destiny" in which the individual is regarded as an agent of change. For Shariati, the recognition of this human destiny represents a progressive, future-oriented, and revolutionary principle in Islam's worldview and its main contribution to religious thought.<sup>269</sup> He argues that by stressing "human autonomy and responsibility" Iqbal's thought reaches similar conclusions as those of modern humanism and existentialism. However, while modern humanists and existentialists assert individual will and autonomy by negating religion Iqbal arrives at this conclusion "in the course of his spiritual journey."<sup>270</sup>

Shariati's own view on human will recognizes individual autonomy and agency while simultaneously acknowledging its limitations. According to him, since the nineteenth century individualists and radical humanists in the West have promoted the idea that "the individual is the prime mover in all social and historical change." On the other hand, however, socialists, naturalists, and social Darwinists have highlighted contextual "determinants" that limit human will and agency. Seeking to reconcile these two views, Shariati favors a dialectical

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<sup>268</sup> Shariati, *Iqbal and Us*, 11.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 38.



approach, which he attributes to Russian-French sociologist and his Sorbonne professor Georges Gurvitch (1894-1969). In this approach, "the individual and society are seen as being in a constant process of constructing and influencing one another."<sup>271</sup> Thus, while the environment in which the individual finds oneself may impose particular limitations on one's agency, the individual can also influence and alter the prevailing "social, historical, cultural, economic, or natural" determinants.<sup>272</sup>

For Shariati, modernity is a condition that enhances human awareness and agency thus altering the dialectic between autonomous will and contextual determinants in favor of the former.<sup>273</sup> Noting the influence of Christian reformation in facilitating the enhancement of human agency in modern Europe, Shariati applauds Afghani and Iqbal for initiating a similar project in Muslim societies and calls on other Muslim intellectuals to follow this progressive reformist path.<sup>274</sup> Emphasizing the role of intellectuals in leading the move toward radical social and political transformation, Shariati describes intellectual responsibility as a "prophetic mission" (*resaalat-e payambar-gooneh*) of raising change-oriented consciousness among the masses about the "discordant realities of the society and of the epoch."<sup>275</sup> Intellectual responsibility, for Shariati, also includes developing a revolutionary ideology, which he describes as a necessary

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<sup>271</sup> Shariati, *Iqbal and Us*, 44.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 46, 110-111.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>275</sup> Ali Shariati, *Return: Collected Works 4 (baazgasht: majmu-eh aasaar shomaareh 4)*, (Tehran: Enteshaaraat-e Elhaam, 1373/1994), 95.

condition for raising social consciousness, mobilizing the masses, and initiating a deep normative change that leads to social transformation.<sup>276</sup>

Shariati's emphasis on the leadership role of intellectuals and his thesis of "committed democracy" (*demokrasi-e mota'ahed*), which he lays out in a 1969 lecture at the Hosseinieh Ershad titled "Community and Leadership" (*ommat va imamat*) has been seen by a number of commentators as an endorsement of a vanguardist vision of top-down change.<sup>277</sup> For critics, the thesis provides clear evidence that Shariati's thought ultimately supported the dictatorship of the Muslim proletariat and the establishment of an Islamic state based on the fusion of spiritual and political leadership.<sup>278</sup> However, an important point which is often neglected in these critiques is that in a number of his later lectures and writings, Shariati explicitly rejects the idea that intellectuals must undertake political leadership and governance roles. According to Shariati, the prophetic mission of intellectuals is "to explain, analyze, and present a picture of socio-political and economic realities to the masses." It is, however, the role of the conscious masses to respond and assume leadership.<sup>279</sup> While in these works Shariati makes references to the concept of a guided democracy, he nevertheless clarifies that

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<sup>276</sup> Shariati, *Return*, 144, 311.

<sup>277</sup> The text of this lecture was published and disseminated widely during Shariati's own life and was later included in the twenty-sixth volume of his Collected Works titled *Ali* (1982).

<sup>278</sup> Hunter, "Islamic Reformist Discourses," 55. Also see: Saeed Rahnema, "Retreat and Return of the Secular in Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011): 34-45, 41.

<sup>279</sup> Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 297.

such a transitional model is only applicable to tribal societies which lack the basic requirements of democratic self-governance.<sup>280</sup>

In *Iqbal and Us* Shariati writes, "Even though I see democracy as the most progressive and even most Islamic system of governance, I think that its realization in a tribal society ... requires a phase of 'committed revolutionary leadership' in order to provide a civilized and democratic social condition."<sup>281</sup> Likewise, in *Return* Shariati is explicit that the role of intellectuals is not one of taking up "political, executive, and revolutionary leadership." Taking political power, Shariati argues, "is an exclusive right of the people, and if they are absent from the theater of political struggle, others cannot claim to do so on their behalf. In fact, in the post revolutionary times, even the best of intellectuals have failed to be good leaders."<sup>282</sup> Shariati's overall orientation in these lectures and essays is one of supporting a bottom-up project of indigenous modernity through a modern and radical reformation of local cultural and religious resources and raising change-oriented consciousness among the masses. According to him, "anyone who recognizes that social change requires more than simply political action would agree that the most essential task of committed intellectuals" is to provide the groundwork for "an intellectual-psychological transformation in the consciousness of their nations."<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Shariati, *Iqbal and Us*, 48.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Shariati, *Return*, 257.

<sup>283</sup> Ali Shariati, "Introduction," in *Kolliat-e Iqbal Lahori (The Poetry Collection of Iqbal Lahori)* (Tehran: Elham, 1384/2005), 8.

## Conclusion

Increasingly in recent years, a number of commentators have pointed to the negotiation of contextually grounded discourses of modernity and sociopolitical development in the works of some of the leading representatives of contemporary Islamic reformism. Drawing attention to the contributions of Arkoun, Abu Zayd, Gülen, Soroush, and others, these commentators believe that in the twenty-first century Islamic reformism has emerged as a force that can align itself with the more progressive sectors of Muslim societies in the ongoing negotiation of democracy, secularism, and human rights. Among others, Hunter argues that by advancing a synthesis of modernity and Islam, contemporary Muslim reformists are introducing indigenous visions of modern and democratic sociopolitical change in their societies.<sup>284</sup> Similarly, Mirsepassi points to a growing tendency among Islamic reformists to develop "a more enlightened understanding of historical and contemporary relations between Islam and the West, as well as venturing profound criticism and interpretation of historical and contemporary Islamic thought and culture with a view to developing more democratic forms in existing Islamic societies." Referring to Arkoun's notion of the "unthoughts" of Islamic thought, Mirsepassi argues that in their modern "reconstruction" and "reconsiderations" of Islamic thought and history, contemporary reformists are engaged in advancing "alternative democratic possibilities while also showing an

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<sup>284</sup> Hunter, "Introduction," xx, 13.

often-overlooked dimension of contemporary Islamic culture and religious discourse."<sup>285</sup>

Challenging the reading of Shariati's thought as a counter-modern discourse of Islamic authenticity, and highlighting his effort to revive the modernist legacy of an earlier generation of Muslim thinkers, neo-Shariatis propose an alternative genealogy of indigenous modernity in Islamic thought which begins with Afghani in the late nineteenth century and continues with Iqbal and Shariati throughout the twentieth century. For neo-Shariatis this alternative genealogy serves two important functions. First, it reveals a sustained and ongoing effort by Muslim thinkers to develop contextually grounded visions of modern change for their respective societies in the aftermath of the encounter with colonial modernity. And second, it locates Shariati within a reform-oriented and progressive current in modern Islamic thought whose preoccupations, visions, and methodologies, continue to be relevant in contemporary Muslim societies.

Even though neo-Shariatis generally regard Shariati as heir to the legacies of Afghani and Iqbal, they nevertheless highlight some of the ways in which Shariati's discourse goes beyond the discourses of his intellectual predecessors. Ehsan Sharaiti, for instance, argues that unlike Afghani, Shariati did not believe that religious or political reform could be initiated through influencing those in positions of power and through the top-down implementation of reformist measures. He also notes that unlike Iqbal, who was primarily interested in the intellectual and philosophical aspects of religious reform, Shariati's project was

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<sup>285</sup> Mirsepassi, *Political Islam*, 11.

firmly grounded in social and political activism and in popular movements.<sup>286</sup> While he acknowledges the influence of Afghani's "anti-colonialism" and Iqbal's "spiritual interpretation of being" on Shariati's thought, Ehsan Shariati nevertheless believes that Shariati's emphasis on advancing non-state centric and bottom-up approaches to social change and his advocacy of the prophetic mission of organic intellectuals in raising revolutionary consciousness among the masses set his discourse apart from those of the former two Muslim thinkers.<sup>287</sup> Hossein Mesbahian too points to Shariati's anti-capitalist orientation, his emphasis on social justice, and his ongoing engagement with socialist and social-democratic intellectual traditions as features that ultimately differentiate his thought and legacy from those of Afghani and Iqbal.<sup>288</sup>

As the preceding discussions showed, Shariati's encounter with and response to modernity also finds common ground with the contributions of a number of contemporary Muslim reformists including Arkoun, Abu Zayd, Gülen, and Soroush. Like these reformist thinkers, Shariati rejects the mutually exclusive binary of Islam and modernity and instead advocates mutual recognition and synthesis. In a similar fashion to reformists such as Arkoun and Abu Zayd, Shariati seeks to delink the idea of modernity from its Western/colonial trajectory and to advance a narrative of modernity as a global/universal condition defined primarily in terms of the recognition of human reason, agency, and autonomy and the emancipation of the individual from the grip of scripture, tradition, and

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<sup>286</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Pas az seh daheh" ("After Three Decades"), interview with Shariati Cultural Foundation, Ali Shariati Information Center, (no date), <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=483> (accessed 20 August 2011).

<sup>287</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Rah-e Shariati."

<sup>288</sup> Mesbahian, "Jamehe bi armaan morde ast."

customs. As such, like Arkoun and Abu Zayd, Shariati rejects the claim that the European Enlightenment constitutes the singular experience and manifestation of modernity and draws attention to the cross-cultural formations and the plural manifestations of the modern processes of change. Moreover, like other Muslim reformists discussed in this chapter, Shariati believes that Islam's rationalist tradition and the works of Muslim thinkers such as Al-Kindi, Razi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Arabi, and others were influential in the emergence of Western Enlightenment thought. And in the same fashion as these reformists Shariati maintains a belief in the existence of some form of an ontological difference between Islamic and Western reason. In particular, like Arkoun, Abu Zayd, and Soroush, Shariati believes that while Enlightenment thought is characterized by abstract or pure rationalism, Islamic thought seeks to reconcile reason with revelation, feeling, and intuition. Finally, even though Shariati died before the 1979 revolution and the subsequent ascendancy of Islamist discourses and movements in Iran and elsewhere, the anti-essentialist orientation of his thought, his explicit rejection of the religious state and political rule by the ecclesiastical class, his endorsement of the principle of popular sovereignty, and his humanist interpretation of Islam find common ground with the critique of Islamism by contemporary reformists such as Soroush and Gülen. It is precisely these elements of Shariati's thought that neo-Shariatis emphasize in their post-revolution critique of Islamism.

While acknowledging some of these commonalities, neo-Shariatis nevertheless insist that Shariati's discourse can be differentiated from other reformist discourses in a number of ways. Sara Shariati, for instance, argues that

while reformists such as Arkoun, Abu Zayd, Gülen, Soroush and others often engage with Islam from a historical, philosophical, or theological vantage point, Shariati's point of entry is primarily a sociological one. She argues that while Shariati does not abandon historical and philosophical perspectives on religion, his overall approach nevertheless treats the "religious matter" as a "social matter" and focuses on the manifestations of religion in everyday life and in concrete social conditions and situations. This attentiveness to public religion, she notes, distinguishes Shariati's reformist discourse from those that focus chiefly on the sacred scripture, theological debates, or the private and personal functions of religion.<sup>289</sup> Moreover, in distinguishing Shariati's discourse from other reformist discourses neo-Shariatis emphasize his egalitarian interpretation of Islamic doctrines, his intellectual engagement with a variety of non-Islamic traditions and his reliance on modern social sciences in analyzing historical and modern processes of social and political change, and his simultaneous attention to the internal and external manifestations of hegemony and asymmetrical power relations.

To further examine some of the ways in which Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought by neo-Shariatis differentiate from other Islamic discourses of indigenous modernity, the following chapter focuses on Shariati/neo-Shariati views on the social and inspirational capacities of a reformed and restructured public religion for advancing contextually negotiated visions of sustainable and bottom-up sociopolitical development in Iran and other Muslim

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<sup>289</sup> Sara Sharaiti, interview by author.



societies. The chapter makes a case that by attending to the complex and dynamic relationship between religious reformation and the modern processes of social and political change, advancing a humanist and anti-domination interpretation of Islam's religious doctrines and traditions, and maintaining a sustained and active presence at the civil society level Shariati and his contemporary intellectual follower have contributed to the negotiation of an egalitarian and democratic discourse of social and political change in pre- and post-1979 revolution Iran.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **PUBLIC RELIGION AND SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT FROM BELOW**

#### **Introduction**

As the previous chapter argued, in its neo-Shariati reading Shariati's intellectual project is seen as an effort to revive and advance the legacies of pioneering Muslim modernists who believed that a radical reconstruction of traditional Islamic thought could serve a progressive role in overcoming the challenges that Muslim societies faced in their encounter with colonial modernity. According to neo-Shariatis, while Shariati called for giving recognition to the universal achievements of the modern age, he also sought to highlight both the capacities and the limitations of the prevailing local traditional and cultural resources for negotiating indigenous discourses of sociopolitical development. Building on the discussions from chapter two, the present chapter focuses on the views of Shariati and neo-Shariatis on the relationship between religion and the modern processes of sociopolitical change. While some of Shariati's secular critics continue to see his Islamic discourse as a turn against modernity, the chapter aims to show that through their sustained and simultaneous critique of tradition and modernity Shariati and neo-Shariatis have contributed to the negotiation of an egalitarian and

democratic discourse of indigenous modernity in pre- and post-1979 revolution Iran.

The chapter begins with an overview of some of the ongoing scholarly debates about the relationship between religion and sociopolitical development in Muslim societies. In particular, the following section will critically examine the hegemonic discourses of secularization and Islamic exceptionalism that came to dominate academic debates on the topic in the twentieth century. To identify an alternative framework for examining the religion-modernity nexus, the chapter draws on the contributions of a number of contemporary scholars such as José Casanova and Fred Dallmayr, who argue that in societies where religion remains a major source of individual and collective identity the public capacities of religion can be used for negotiating progressive and contextually grounded visions of social and political change. After examining Shariati's views on the relationship between religious reformation and the rise of modernity in Europe, the chapter makes a case that Shariati saw a radical cultural and intellectual re-orientation of Muslim societies through a project of religious reform as the overall methodology of a bottom-up project of social and political development. The final section focuses on the new readings of Shariati's unfinished project by neo-Shariatists in post-revolutionary Iran. I argue that in giving recognition to the progressive inspirational/ontological and social/mobilizational capacities of public religion the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity challenges both Western-centric and culturalist discourses of social and political change and

offers a social-democratic alternative to the visions of indigenous modernity advanced by the advocates of Islamic liberalism.

## **Rethinking the Modernity-Religion Nexus**

### *SECULARIZATION AND ISLAMIC EXCEPTIONALISM*

Throughout much of the twentieth century, the debates on the relationship between religion and the modern processes of social and political development were generally dominated by various accounts of the secularization thesis.<sup>1</sup> The thesis has its roots in post-Enlightenment thought and the predictions of some of the leading nineteenth century European sociological theorists about the eventual disappearance of religion from public life in modern industrial societies. In particular, Max Weber's views on the relationship between rationalization and modernity were a major influence on secularization and modernization theories in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Weber regarded the rationalization and secularization of public life and the reign of human reason as the particular form

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<sup>1</sup> See: Talcott Parsons, *The Evolution of Societies* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977); Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); Bryan Wilson, "Secularization: The Inherited Model," in *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, ed. P. E. Hammond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 9-20; Thomas Luckmann, and Karel Dobbelaere, "Secularization: A Multidimensional Concept," *Current Sociology* 29, no. 2 (1981): 1-21; Wolfgang Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination: A Weberian Perspective*, trans. Neil Solomon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Despite his view that modernity was a force of rationalization, secularization, and disenchantment in the world, Weber also believed that there existed a close link between the reformation of Christian religious doctrines and the rise of modernity in Europe. He examined this relationship in detail in his 1904 book entitled, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, which was published in English in 1905 under the title of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

of social change that had facilitated the emergence of modernity in Europe.<sup>3</sup> Following a Weberian model, subsequent generations of sociologists came to regard modernity as the product of the structural differentiation of religion from other realms (i.e. politics, economy, science, etc.), the privatization of religion, and the decline of religion's social functions.<sup>4</sup>

In the twentieth century literature on modernity in Muslim societies, however, Islam and Muslim cultures were often regarded as being exceptionally resistant to secularization and to an otherwise universal trajectory of human progress. In *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (1958), for instance, American sociologist Daniel Lerner argued that the anti-rationalist and anti-positivist characters of the Muslim culture prevented an organic transition to secularism and democracy in Muslim societies. Lerner's "Mecca or mechanization" thesis favored top-down modernization reforms such as those implemented in Kemalist Turkey and Pahlavist Iran.<sup>5</sup> The rise of Islamism in various Muslim countries throughout the 1970s and 1980s was also regarded by many as further evidence of the essential incompatibility between Islam and modernity.

For British-Czech social anthropologist, Ernest Gellner, the rise of Islam represented the singular "exception" to the secularization thesis. Gellner argued

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<sup>3</sup> William H. Swatos, Jr. and Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (Autumn, 1999): 211-212.

<sup>4</sup> Asad, Talal, "Religion, Nation-State, Secularism," in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, ed. Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 178-9.

<sup>5</sup> Dale F. Eickelman, "Islam and the Languages of Modernity," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1, special issues, Multiple Modernities (Winter, 2000), 119. See: Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958).

that while modernity was the process of rationalization and secularization of the public sphere, its introduction into Muslim societies had in fact reinforced religion's hold over society.<sup>6</sup> In his view, the increased "hold of Islam over the minds and hearts of believers" in the modern world transcended all social, economic, class, gender, and demographic demarcations among Muslims. Thus, Gellner concluded that if "Christianity has its Bible belt," Islam, in its entirety, "is a Qur'an belt."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in their analysis of the challenges of the transition to secularism and democracy in Muslim societies, commentators such as Bertrand Badie, Marcel Gauche, and Remi Brague, came to regard Islam as an all-encompassing doctrine of divine authority that impeded the sociopolitical and socioeconomic development of societies under its influence.<sup>8</sup>

While Samuel Huntington did not see Islam as the singular exception to an otherwise universal trajectory of secularization, he nevertheless regarded the late twentieth century "Islamic revival" as an indication of an inevitable future clash between the Western civilization and its antagonists, namely the Islamic and the Confucian civilizations.<sup>9</sup> In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Huntington described the "Islamic Resurgence" as a "mainstream" and "pervasive" turn to religious fundamentalism in Muslim societies and a

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<sup>6</sup> Nader Hashemi, "The Multiple Histories of Secularism: Muslim Societies in Comparison," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 3-4 (March 2010), 330. See: Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Gellner, "Forward," in *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, ed. Akbar S Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (London: Routledge, 1994), xi.

<sup>8</sup> Armando Salvatore, "Tradition and Modernity within Islamic Civilization and the West," in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore, and Martin van Bruinessen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 4. Also see: Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1985] 1997); Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (South Bend, IN: Saint Augustine's Press, [1992] 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993), 33.

popular turn against the separation of church and state that typified the Western civilization.<sup>10</sup> According to Huntington, during the Cold War era global conflict was characterized by a civil conflict within Western civilization between the competing ideologies of "communism and liberal democracy."<sup>11</sup> In the post-Cold War era, he argued, the primary source of global conflict was a clash between the democratic and liberal West and the non-democratic and non-liberal "Confucian-Islamic states."<sup>12</sup>

The thesis of Islamic/Muslim exceptionalism came to prominence yet again in the post-9/11 context of the War on Terrorism and the calls for the "imposition or promotion of democracy" in Muslim societies by external powers.<sup>13</sup> In *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (2003), British-American Orientalist Bernard Lewis, who had already used the phrase "the clash of civilizations" in 1990 to describe the encounter between Muslim societies and the modern West,<sup>14</sup> argued that the socioeconomic and sociopolitical state of contemporary Muslim societies indicated an overall failure of modernization and a "rejection of modernity in favor of a return to the sacred past."<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, echoing Daniel Lerner's "Mecca or mechanization" thesis, Lewis contended that in order for them to meet the challenges of modernity Muslims must reject the

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 110.

<sup>11</sup> Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations?," 23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>13</sup> Sanford Lakoff, "The Reality of Muslim Exceptionalism," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 4 (October 2004), 138.

<sup>14</sup> See: Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage: Why So Many Muslims Deeply Resent the West, and Why Their Bitterness Will Not Be Easily Mollified," *The Atlantic Monthly* 26, no. 3 (September 1990): 47-58.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: Random House, 2004), 120.

Iranian model of a return to the past and fundamentalism and instead embrace the Turkish model of secularism through condemnation of the past.<sup>16</sup>

Critics of the thesis of Islamic exceptionalism problematize the ways in which the thesis essentializes both Islam and modernity and undermines their plural manifestations and traditions. According to one critic, the "essentialized conception" of the relationship between religion and politics in Muslim societies presents a picture of these societies as "uniquely resistant to secularism and liberal democracy due to an inner antimodern, religiocultural dynamic that has few parallels with other religious traditions or civilizations."<sup>17</sup> Another critic argues that the construction of Islam into "a uniquely intractable instance of active religion in the modern world" in effect reduces "the rich and diverse history of Muslim societies across three continents and one-and-a-half millennia ... to the essential principles of a distinctive 'religious-civilization'."<sup>18</sup>

The critical deconstruction of the thesis of Islamic exceptionalism has been taken into account in some of the contemporary reformulations of the secularization thesis. In *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (2004), American political scientists Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart challenge Huntington's account of the inherent incompatibility between the democratic values of Western civilization and the anti-democratic values of the Islamic civilization. Citing data from World Values Survey (1995-2001), they argue that there are "no significant differences between the publics living in the West and in

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<sup>16</sup> See: Bernard Lewis, "What Went Wrong," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 2002, 43-45.

<sup>17</sup> Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), xi.

<sup>18</sup> Talal Asad, "Europe against Islam: Islam in Europe," *The Muslim World* 87, no. 2 (1997), 188.



Muslim religious cultures" with regard to support for democracy and democratic ideals and practices.<sup>19</sup> According to Norris and Inglehart the rise of religion in Muslim societies was not the exception to the secularization thesis, but rather one of various challenges to the thesis's classical accounts. They point to the popular resurgence of religion around the world at the end of the twentieth century and argue that the continued "health and vitality" of religion in contemporary societies constitutes "the most sustained challenge" the secularization theory has faced "in its long history."<sup>20</sup>

Despite their critical reassessment of some of the classical premises of the secularization thesis, Norris and Inglehart are ultimately concerned with saving the meta-narrative of modernity as a global trajectory of transition from sacred to secular. Distinguishing between "agrarian," "industrial," and "post-industrial" societies, they argue that while in the agrarian and industrial societies of the global South religion continues to play an important role in social and political life, in post-industrial societies the trajectory of modernity has been one of erosion of religious functions and values in the public sphere. The modern surge of religion around the world, in their view, is primarily a consequence of population growth in poor and agrarian countries, which will reverse once these countries transition to modernity and a post-industrial phase.<sup>21</sup> Norris and Inglehart's argument about the erosion of public religion in post-industrial societies, however, has already been refuted by the critics of secularization thesis.

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<sup>19</sup> Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 146.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 166.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-24.

Casanova, among others, has pointed to the continued and rising patterns of public religion in the post-industrial societies of Western Europe and North America.<sup>22</sup> Other commentators too have drawn attention to the diverse social and political manifestations of religiosity in modern societies, arguing that the framework of private religion and secular public sphere offers a problematic representation of the realities of the modern world. According to Mendieta and VanAntwerpen (2011), much like the modern public-private binary the religious-secular binary is today in need of revision, rethinking, and re-working.<sup>23</sup>

### *EMERGING ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORKS*

In recent decades, a number of alternative theoretical frameworks have emerged seeking to explain the sustained presence of religion in the modern world and in the ongoing processes of social and political change. Among these, theories of public religion and multiple modernities, developed mainly in the disciplines of sociology, history, philosophy, religious studies, and cultural studies, have received much attention and are being used by an increasing number of Western and non-Western commentators. These frameworks have drawn attention to the continued vitality and the plural functions of religion in the public sphere in modern societies and have highlighted the diverse modes of encounter between local traditions and the modern processes of sociopolitical and socioeconomic developments around the world.

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<sup>22</sup> See: José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 101-119.

<sup>23</sup> Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, "Introduction: The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.

According to American sociologist of religion José Casanova, the meta-narratives of secularization and modernization often failed to take into account the historical and ongoing role of religion in the negotiation of contextually grounded patterns of modernity and secularism across various Western and non-Western societies. In *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994) Casanova draws on Weber's analysis about the links between the Protestant Reformation and the rise of capitalism in Europe in order to highlight the role of religious reformation in the historical rise of European modernity.<sup>24</sup> Using case studies from a number of Catholic-majority societies, Casanova argues that in the course of the transition to democracy in these societies public religion has served as the source of a "prophetic commitment to the principles of freedom, justice, and solidarity."<sup>25</sup> In his view, the Catholic *aggiornamento*, or the transformation of Catholic doctrines in the course of the Second Vatican Council during the early and mid 1960s, played a major role in facilitating the subsequent processes of democratization in Latin America and Eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s. This transformation, it is argued, reconciled the religious core of Catholicism with the modern values of democracy and individual rights and freedoms.<sup>26</sup>

In a number of his works over the last decade, Casanova has sought to examine how the analytical framework of public religion may help to understand the relationship between religion and modern social and political change in

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<sup>24</sup> José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 234.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, 105, 133.

contemporary Muslim societies.<sup>27</sup> Acknowledging the plural manifestations of public religion in these societies and noting Islam's lack of "centralized institutions and administrative structures," Casanova argues that the ongoing reformulations of Islamic understandings by contemporary Muslim thinkers are likely to produce "multiple, diverse, and often contradictory" visions of social and political change.<sup>28</sup> According to him, while it is unlikely that all Islamic revival movements "will be uniformly conducive to democratization," it is safe to stipulate that "democracy is unlikely to grow and thrive in Muslim countries until political actors who are striving for it are also able to 'frame' their discourse in a publicly recognizable Islamic idiom."<sup>29</sup>

Casanova's recent work has also challenged the Western-centric conceptions of modernity and secularism as processes particular to Europe or to Western Christianity. Utilizing the conceptual framework of "multiple modernities" Casanova highlights the diverse and cross-cultural experiences of modern social and political change around the world.<sup>30</sup> In Casanova's view, any analytical framework that envisions modernity as a total break from "tradition" and/or as a unilinear and progressive transition from "sacred" to "secular," is inadequate for understanding the diverse experiences and manifestations of modernity in Western and non-Western societies. Drawing attention to the diverse

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<sup>27</sup> José Casanova, "Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam," *Social Research* 68, no. 4 (Winter 2001), 1051. Also see: José Casanova, "Catholic and Muslim Politics in Comparative Perspective," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 1, no 2 (December 2005): 89-108.

<sup>28</sup> Casanova, "Civil Society and Religion," 1062.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1075-76.

<sup>30</sup> See: Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited"; Casanova, "Catholic and Muslim Politics." Also see: S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1-30.

traditions of modernity, he argues that while all "traditions" are radically transformed in the encounter with modernity, "in the process of reformulating their traditions for modern contexts" societies negotiate diverse forms of "religious" and "secular" modernity.<sup>31</sup>

By giving recognition to cultural-historical particularity and difference, theories of multiple modernities challenge the idea that Western modernity constitutes the singular and universal trajectory of modernity.<sup>32</sup> While the framework acknowledges the emancipatory aspects of Enlightenment modernity, it also emphasizes the cross-cultural and cross-civilizational formations of the modern patterns of change, as well as the multiple manifestations of modern experiences and preferences. According to Armando Salvatore, the development of this framework is rooted in the increased attention of a number of political and historical sociologists including Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Johann P. Arnason, to the concept of civilization in the early 1970s. This newfound interest in the sociological study of civilizational diversity, argues Salvatore, "marked the beginning of a long trajectory that would make modernity not only more open and plural, but also more adherent to an increasingly complexifying world, and thus

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<sup>31</sup> Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," 106.

<sup>32</sup> See: Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson eds., *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995); Scott Lash, *Another Modernity, a Different Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Dilip P. Gaonkar ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 153–73; Fred Dallmayr, "Global Modernization: Toward Different Modernities?", in Fred Dallmayr, *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 85–104; S. N. Eisenstadt ed., *Multiple Modernities* (Transaction: New Brunswick, NJ, 2002); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Modjtaba Sadria ed. *Multiple Modernities in Muslim Societies: Tangible Elements and Abstract Perspectives* (London: I.B. Tauris 2009).

more 'tangible'.<sup>33</sup> For Eisenstadt, the very idea of "multiple modernities" goes against the long-prevalent assumption "that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in modern Europe and the basic institutional constellations that emerged there would ultimately take over in all modernizing and modern societies."<sup>34</sup>

Applied to the context of contemporary Muslim societies, theories of multiple modernities have sought to reveal the false universalism of Eurocentric meta-narratives of change and to give attention to the complex and nuanced dynamics of lived Muslim modernities. In examining the ongoing negotiation of modernity in Muslim societies, theorists of multiple modernities highlight the capacities of public or "civil" Islam for the "creation and sustenance" of modern civil society.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, by emphasizing the universal and cross-civilizational aspects of modernity, multiple modernities seeks to avoid lapsing into cultural essentialism or relativism.<sup>36</sup> For Fred Dallmayr, whose work has contributed to the development of this normative framework, multiple modernities is useful for analyzing the ways in which a range of Muslim thinkers have gone beyond the dichotomous discourses of modernism-secularism and traditionalism-Islamism, and developed contextually grounded discourses of human dignity,

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<sup>33</sup> Armando Salvatore "From Civilizations to Multiple Modernities: The Issue of the Public Sphere," in *Multiple Modernities in Muslim Societies: Tangible Elements and Abstract Perspectives*, ed. Mojtaba Sadria (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 19-20.

<sup>34</sup> S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," in *Multiple Modernities*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Transaction: New Brunswick, NJ, 2002), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Aryn B. Sajoo ed. *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002), 16-17.

<sup>36</sup> See: Aryn B. Sajoo, "Muslim Modernities and Civic Pluralism," *ISIM Review*, no. 21 (Spring 2008), 28; Nilüfer Göle, "Snapshots of Islamic Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1, *Multiple Modernities* (Winter, 2000), 91; Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Universalism from Below: Muslims and Democracy in Context," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 2, no. 2 (December 2009), 282.

democracy, individual rights and freedoms, and social justice.<sup>37</sup> Dallmayr's analysis draws attention to the efforts of a number of contemporary Islamic scholars to negotiate a third way between the total separation and the total fusion of religion and politics, which he regards as two undemocratic and ultimately unsustainable approaches. In challenging these two extremes, Dallmayr believes Muslim thinkers such as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im and Abdolkarim Soroush have revealed the possibility of envisioning and nurturing diverse forms of modernity and democracy. According to Dallmayr, since democracy cannot be separated from "the motivations and aspirations of ordinary citizens," and since these aspirations are themselves reflective of the prevailing religious and cultural traditions, customs, and beliefs, "it follows that democracies cannot be the same everywhere but are bound to vary in accordance with beliefs and customs prevalent in different societies or regions."<sup>38</sup>

### **Ali Shariati: Beyond the Modernity-Religion Binary**

In the context of mid-twentieth century Iran, Shariati's emphasis on the necessity of religious reform in negotiating modern visions of social and political change challenged the prevailing discourses of modernization and secularization, which held that the transition to modernity required replacing traditional and religious thought with Enlightenment rationalism and positivism. By highlighting the historical and continuing interactions between public religion and social

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<sup>37</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Whither Democracy? Religion, Politics and Islam," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 4, 442.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

transformation, Shariati sought to go beyond the modernity-religion dichotomy that informed the prevailing modernist and traditionalist discourses of his time. Critiquing Western-centric discourses that advocated the privatization of religion, he drew attention to the historical links between religious reformation and the rise of modernity in Europe. He identified the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation as a precursor to Western modernity, and called on Muslim intellectuals to initiate a similar project in their societies. According to Shariati, while the rise of modernity in Europe had begun with the fifteenth century return to the classics during the Renaissance it was the reformation of Christian doctrines in the course of Protestantism that popularized and deepened the intellectual legacy of Renaissance thinkers.<sup>39</sup> In his view, the combined forces of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment facilitated a move toward religious toleration and philosophical and political pluralism in Europe and contributed to the emancipation of the modern individual from the totalitarian domination of the church and medieval traditions. Shariati also argued that European modernity served an emancipatory role by secularizing the state and education system and "by freeing science, philosophy, arts, literature, and economics from the authority of the ecclesiastical class."<sup>40</sup>

Shariati's historical analysis of the advance of modernity in Europe was primarily concerned with the processes that, in his view, ultimately facilitated the

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<sup>39</sup> Ali Shariati, "Estekhray va tasfieh manabe farhangi" ("Extraction and Refinement of Cultural Resources"), 1348/1969, C.W. 20, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Ali Shariati, "Naameh beh Ehsan" ("Letter to Ehsan") Farvardin-Ordibehesht 1356/April-May 1977, C.W. 1, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.



recognition of individual autonomy and agency. He believed that for the first time in the history of the modern world the masses of people had become the agents of change and champions of human emancipation. Modernity, in his view, had also enhanced the condition for the realization of two universal ideals of humanity, namely freedom and equality.<sup>41</sup> He argued that the ideals of "democracy" and "socialism," which were manifested in the prevailing paradigms of the modern world, were "the most progressive ideologies bearing the intellectual legacies of all freedom lovers and justice seekers in human history."<sup>42</sup> However, Shariati also held that in its emancipatory function modernity was not a total break from religious traditions but rather a continuation of the core message of monotheistic religions. He argued that while the message of human dignity, freedom, and equality was historically propagated by various prophetic traditions, it found few true followers and often remained as mere ethical advice. In the twentieth century, however, these ideals had become truly universal concepts, giving rise to a global struggle for freedom and equality "from the most advanced modern societies to the most backward tribal societies."<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, Shariati held that the advance of science and reason in the course of Western modernity were important developments that Muslim and other non-Western societies must take into account in negotiating their own modernities. While he regarded modern science as a universal product of

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<sup>41</sup> Ali Shariati, "Arezooha" ("Aspirations") 1355/1976, C.W. 25, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 22, 231, quoted in Reza Alijani, *Rend-e kham: Shariati-shenasi jeld-e yekom: zamaneh, zendegi, va arman-ha (The Pure Nonconformist: Shariatiology Volume One: Era, Life, and Ideals)* (Tehran: Ghalam 1387), 140.

<sup>43</sup> Shariati, "Arezooha."

collective humanity, Shariati also argued that the emancipation of reason from church dogma in the course of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation greatly benefited scientific advancement in Europe. According to him, modern scientific achievements had also enhanced the condition for human emancipation. Rather than attributing the historical problems of "poverty, hunger, tyranny, and domination" to divine will or other deterministic forces, modern humanity sought to utilize its autonomous will to find worldly solutions to these and other challenges. Furthermore, he argued, the modern expansion of educational opportunities had made it easier for the masses of people to have access to scientific knowledge and to take charge of their own lives.<sup>44</sup>

While Shariati was attentive to the emancipatory aspects of modernity, he nevertheless rejected the view of Western modernity as a homogenous and monolithic whole. For him, even though the Western experience of modernity was an important achievement, it was nevertheless a multifaceted phenomenon that needed to be both contextualized and critiqued. His analysis, thus, distinguished between the emancipatory and the oppressive aspects of really-existing modernity and emphasized that the negotiation of modernity in non-Western societies must take into account not only modernity's positive and progressive achievements, but also its negative and destructive outcomes.

According to his contemporary intellectual followers, Shariati believed that with the rise of industrial capitalism and colonialism the oppressive aspects of modernity effectively undermined the quest for the universal ideals of freedom

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<sup>44</sup> Shariati, "Arezooha."

and equality. Ehsan Shariati, for instance, argues that while Shariati praised the emancipatory core of classical liberalism, he was nevertheless critical of "bourgeois liberalism," which he saw as a conservative discourse aimed at justifying and preserving the status quo and the prevailing relations of capitalist exploitation and colonial domination.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Reza Alijani believes that while he praised the egalitarian core of socialism, Shariati also argued that in the really-existing socialist states the ideal of equality had been demoralized by totalitarian structures.<sup>46</sup> Alijani also notes that despite his belief that scientific advances served an important role in freeing the modern individual from the prevailing deterministic worldview of medieval and feudal Europe, Shariati nevertheless held that the servitude of science to power in modern societies had effectively undermined its emancipatory function.<sup>47</sup>

In his reading of Shariati's thought, Alijani shows that Shariati was a harsh critic of what he saw as the prevailing racist and Eurocentric accounts of modernity that dismissed non-Western cultural and intellectual resources as non-modern and uncivilized. For Shariati, while the Islamic culture and civilization had historically served an important role in the rise of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in Europe, Westerncentric discourses negated and excluded this contribution from the historiography of modernity.<sup>48</sup> Critiquing the view that claimed modern science, philosophy, and culture as the exclusive products of

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<sup>45</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Goftegooye rooznameh Etemaad ba Ehsan Shariati" ("Etemaad Newspaper's Interview with Ehsan Shariati"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date) <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=96> (accessed 9 September 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Reza Alijani, *Shariat va gharb* (*Shariati and the West*) (Tehran: Ghalam, 1388/2009), 32.

<sup>47</sup> Alijani, *Shariat va gharb*, 40.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

Western culture and civilization, Shariati argued that colonial modernity advanced a vision of "European culture as the singular trajectory of human culture."<sup>49</sup> Shariati described "monoculture" as a product of colonialism and pointed to the "interesting coincidence" that the term explained the processes through which the expansion of colonialism obliterated both economic and intellectual-cultural diversity around the world.<sup>50</sup>

Alijani further shows that for Shariati the "crisis" of Western modernity was caused by the rise of industrial capitalism, the ascendancy of machinism, the reduction of humans from autonomous agents of change to mere workforce and instruments of production, and the rise of a culture of consumerism and profiteering had alienated modern individuals from their true humanity. Shariati, Alijani argues, believed that these conditions had created a "philosophical-spiritual" crisis in the West, which found manifestations in a range of social ills including the rising rates of divorce and suicide.<sup>51</sup> For Alijani, it was precisely this view of Western modernity that informed Shariati's Fanonian call for a "new thought," a "new humanity," and a new and more humane modernity that did not seek to turn the Third World into another Europe, another United States, or another Soviet Bloc.<sup>52</sup> However, while Fanon's call for reclaiming the Enlightenment on the basis of the particular experience of the colonized did not engage with religious modes of thought and action, Shariati called for an

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<sup>49</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 2, 67, quoted in Alijani, *Shariat va gharb*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Alijani, *Shariat va gharb*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>52</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 1, 110, quoted in Alijani, *Shariat va gharb*, 17.

alternative to Enlightenment modernity precisely by utilizing the social and inspirational capacities of religion.

As the previous chapter discussed, Shariati believed that in a society where religious norms and institutions prevail, any sustainable change must begin with a transformation in religious thought. Rejecting the dominant view about the irreconcilability of modernity and religion, Shariati argued that genuine and sustainable progress could not be achieved without a radical critique and modern deconstruction of traditional and religious thought. He argued that negotiating and achieving the universal fruits of modernity in Muslim societies required nothing short of a total restructuring of Islamic thought and a project of "Islamic Protestantism."<sup>53</sup> Drawing attention to the progressive role of the Protestant Reformation in facilitating the emancipatory processes of modernity in the European context, Shariati called on Muslim intellectuals to follow the examples of Afghani and Iqbal and to seek to "revitalize religious thought" in their societies.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, Shariati held that a modern restructuring of Islamic thought could contribute to the search for an alternative ontological/philosophical basis for negotiating a more humane modernity than the really-existing Western model. In this effort, Shariati sought to continue Iqbal's project of reconciling modern reason with its others (emotion, intuition, revelation, etc.) on the basis of a

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<sup>53</sup> Reza Alijani, *Seh Shariati dar ayineh zehn-e ma : eslam-garay-e enghelabi, motefaker-e mosleh, rend-e aref* (Three Shariatis in Our Perceptions : Revolutionary Islamist, Refomist Intellectual, Artful Mystic) (Tehran : Ghalam, 1389/2010), 29.

<sup>54</sup> Ali Shariati, *Iqbal and Us: Collected Works 5 (Ma va Iqbal: majmooh asaar 5)*, (Aachen, Germany: Hosseinieh Ershad, 1978), 9.

unitarian (*tawhidi*) religious worldview. However, Shariati also expanded Iqbal's overwhelmingly philosophical discourse in a sociopolitical direction by proposing a synthesis of spirituality, equality, and freedom as an alternative basis for negotiating an emancipatory and indigenous discourse of modernity for Muslim societies.

#### *THE METHDOLOGY OF AN INDIGENOUS MODERNITY*

Shariati's project of indigenous modernity can be described as a project of radical cultural transformation that seeks to provide a favorable condition for deep structural change.<sup>55</sup> As one leading neo-Shariati figure points out, for Shariati normative change must precede structural change and "a cultural revolution must occur before a political and emancipatory revolution."<sup>56</sup> However, while Shariati's approach focused on normative-cultural transformation, he consistently emphasized the necessity of social and political responsibility, commitment, and activism. According to Shariati, social and political struggles shape the "self-consciousness" of organic intellectuals and make them aware of "the needs,

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<sup>55</sup> While Shariati's approach emphasized sociocultural transformation, he also acknowledged that change at the material/structural level also led to change at the social/cultural level. He argued that in examining the relationship between cultural and material change his analysis was neither exclusively Marxian, nor exclusively Weberian, but instead Marx-Weberian.

<sup>56</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Shariati andishmand-e azadi: matn-e kamel sokhanrani-e Ehsan Shariati dar marasem siomin salgard shahadat-e doktor Ali Shariati dar Hosseinieh Ershad - Khordad 1386" ("Shariati, the Thinker of Freedom: The Full Text of Ehsan Shariati's Talk at the Thirtieth Anniversary of Shariati's Martyrdom at the Hosseinieh Ershad - June 2007"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date), <http://drshariati.org/show.asp?id=30> (Accessed 2 November 2012).

demands, ideals, strengths, and weaknesses of the masses of people and their capacities for taking action and change."<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, while Shariati stressed the transformative role of culture in social and political change, he also discussed a range of structural factors such as natural environment, historical context, social conditions, relations of domination, and relations of exploitation in determining the conditions in which individuals and societies find themselves. At the same time, by highlighting the role of individual agency in changing the prevailing social order, Shariati argued that through the force of their autonomous will humans can overcome structural determinants.<sup>58</sup> Modernity, according to Shariati, had enhanced the condition for overcoming structural limitations and "manipulating" the forces of historical and material determinism. In his view, initiating a normative-cultural re-orientation and giving recognition to individual agency and autonomy could help Muslim societies overcome the structural causes of their stagnation and underdevelopment.<sup>59</sup> Shariati placed emphasis on the leadership role of Muslim intellectuals in facilitating this normative-cultural transformation and the project of Islamic Protestantism.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some of Shariati's critics believe that his emphasis on the leadership role of intellectuals and his thesis of

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<sup>57</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 2, 176-177, quoted in Reza Alijani, *Rend-e kham: Shariati-shenasi jeld-e yekom: zamaneh, zendegi, va arman-ha (The Pure Nonconformist: Shariatiology Volume One: Era, Life, and Ideals)* (Tehran: Ghalam 1387), 190.

<sup>58</sup> Ali Shariati, "Khodsazi-e enghelabi" ("Revolutionary Self-Preparedness"), 1355/1976, C.W. 2, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Ali Shariati, "Naameh beh Ehsan" ("Letter to Ehsan"), Azar-Day 1355/December 1967-January 1968, C.W. 1, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

committed democracy (*demokrasi-e mota'ahed*) reflect a Leninistic view of top-down change through the leadership of the revolutionary vanguard. Even though neo-Shariatis critique the thesis of committed democracy, they neither believe that it represents Shariati's core political doctrine, nor that it points to an anti-democratic or anti-modern orientation in his thought. Instead, neo-Shariatis argue that the thesis is reflective of Shariati's concern with the challenges of modern and democratic sociopolitical change in the global South in the post-colonial context. According to Ehsan Shariati, for example, Shariati's account of guided democracy must be understood in relation to his overall project of sustainable change from below through the emancipatory force of revolutionary consciousness. Shariati, it is argued, believed that the realization of democracy in post-colonial societies was unlikely in the absence of a conscious citizenry and, therefore, favored a transitional phase to provide the necessary conditions for genuine democratization.<sup>60</sup>

Ehsan Shariati makes a case that Shariati's thesis of committed democracy was influenced by the debates that occurred in the context of the 1955 Bandung Conference about the challenges of the transition to democracy in the newly independent countries of the global South.<sup>61</sup> The thesis, he argues, was informed by Shariati's view that the realization of democracy in the post-colonial context required a transitional phase during which committed and revolutionary

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<sup>60</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Talfigh dar projeh."

<sup>61</sup> The Bandung Conference (the Afro-Asian Conference) was a gathering of representatives from twenty-nine Asian and African states that took place April 18-24, 1955. In addition to the host state, Indonesia, other organizing states of the conference included Myanmar (Burma), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, and Pakistan. The conference sought to promote increased economic and political cooperation among newly independent Asian and African countries in the context of Cold War era neo-colonial relations of power.



intellectuals provide the groundwork for genuine democratization by empowering the masses and familiarizing them with their "citizenship rights." Moreover, Ehsan Shariati believes that Shariati's support for the thesis was informed by his "disillusionment" with the prospects of gradual political reform through parliamentary democracy in Iran in the aftermath of the 1953 American-British backed coup against the government of Muhammad Mosaddegh. In his view, the failed experience of Mosaddegh's national-democratic government led Shariati to believe that in the face of domestic tyranny and foreign domination political reformism through electoral politics is insufficient for achieving "democracy, independence, and popular sovereignty."<sup>62</sup>

Neo-Shariatis like Taghi Rahmani also argue that in the late phase of his life Shariati was equally disillusioned with really-existing guided democracies and came to revise his earlier views about the leadership role of revolutionary intellectuals.<sup>63</sup> It is also noted that in a number of his later works, including *Return* and *Iqbal and Us*, Shariati explicitly argued against the political leadership of the intellectual class and emphasized the prophetic mission of intellectuals to empower people by raising change-oriented consciousness. According to Ehsan Shariati, Shariati's views in these works regarding the role of committed intellectuals in raising change-oriented consciousness find common ground with a number of progressive traditions in the West including democratic socialism and

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<sup>62</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Talfigh dar projeh."

<sup>63</sup> Taghi Rahmani, "Azadi dar marhaleh eraadeh, shenaakht, va ghaanoon" ("Freedom in three Phase: Will, Recognition, and Law"), *Payam-e Hajar*, no. 269 special issue, Shariati and Freedom, 25 Khordad 1378/15 June 1999, 31.

the school of critical theory.<sup>64</sup> Drawing attention to Shariati's simultaneous emphasis on the ideals of freedom and equality, Ehsan Shariati argues that Shariati's political thought has more in common with the anti-authoritarian discourses of Luxemburg and Gramsci than with the vanguardist discourses of Lenin and Stalin.<sup>65</sup>

## A Neo-Shariati Discourse of Indigenous Modernity

### BEYOND SHARIATI

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<sup>64</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Mavane estemraar rah-e Shariati" (The Challenges of Continuing Shariati's Path"), *Raahnaameh*, (no date) <http://ehsanshariati.org/show/?id=6> (accessed 4 January 2013). In philosophy and political theory the school of critical theory often refers to a range of neo-Marxist European (primarily German) philosophers and social theorists whose contributions focus on analyzing the objective and normative conditions of human emancipation. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), and Eric Fromm (1900-1980) are some of the pioneering figures of this intellectual tradition. The brand of critical theory advanced by these German thinkers is also recognized as the Frankfurt School. The contributions of critical theory and the Frankfurt School to the study of modernity will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>65</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Talfigh dar projeh." Also see: Ehsan Shariati, *"Hamchenan armangara, enghelabi, va ideolojik hastam,"* ("I Remain Utopian, Revolutionary, and Ideological"), interview with Susan Shariati, *Shahrvand-e Emrooz*, 10 Tir 1387/30 June 2008, <http://shahrvandemrooz.blogfa.com/post-557.aspx> (accessed 3 November 2011); Ehsan Shariati, "Pedaran va pesaran: Ehsan Shariati va Soroush Dabagh az andisheh khod va pedaraneshan migooyand" ("Fathers and Sons: Ehsan Shariati and Soroush Dabagh on their Own Ideas and their Fathers' Legacies") interview with Reza Khojasteh Rahimi, *Mehrnameh* no. 1, Esfand 1388/March 2010, <http://www.mehnameh.ir/article/133/> (accessed January 7, 2013). Other commentators too, have noted the common-ground of Shariati's thought with the dialectical approaches to normative and structural change in the European leftist thought as well as in Latin American liberation theology. Among others, Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi has described Shariati's cultural approach to social change as "a Gramscian moment in contemporary Iranian politics." Ghamari-Tabrizi writes, "Similar to Gramsci's assertion that relations of dominance are manifested in the institutions of civil society, Shari'ati argued that 'an institutionalized movement disappears in the web of the existing social institutions, i.e., state; family; language; banks and insurance; retirement plans; saving accounts; and even lottery tickets' (Shari'ati, 1971: 39). In this context, Shari'ati believed that so long as religion remains disengaged with public issues of justice, it would remain as another repressive institution of civil society. Gramsci drew a dialectical relation between 'the ethical-political aspect of politics or theory of hegemony and consent' and 'the aspect of force and economics'. In the same vein, Shari'ati's 'trinity of oppression' depicted how the institutionalized religion ideologically justified the political order and economic power of dominant classes." See: Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, "Iran: Ali Shari'ati and Abdolkarim Soroush Contentious Public Religion: Two Conceptions of Islam in Revolutionary," *International Sociology* 19, no. 4 (December 2004), 512.

In advancing the unfinished project of Ali Shariati in post-revolutionary Iran, neo-Shariatis have critically revisited various aspects of his thoughts and "unthoughts."<sup>66</sup> According to Ehsan Shariati, "to remain in Shariati is to stagnate," and to continue Shariati's project means to go beyond his immediate discourse.<sup>67</sup> He argues that Shariati's followers must critically re-assess his views and seek to identify and address his "errors."<sup>68</sup> In their critical engagement with his intellectual legacy, neo-Shariatis have distinguished between the various phases of Shariati's life, as well as between his intrinsic and contingent ideas.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, neo-Shariatis seek to critically re-read the core of Shariati's thoughts in light of contemporary developments in Iran and other Muslim societies. Pointing to the rise of Islamist currents throughout the 1970s and 1980s, they argue that while Shariati did not anticipate such developments, contemporary Muslim reformers must take note of these events in their engagement with religion and tradition.<sup>70</sup>

While even in some of his later works Shariati appears to have maintained a measure of faith in the need for "committed democracy" under certain social and political circumstances,<sup>71</sup> the neo-Shariati discourse has gone beyond Shariati's

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<sup>66</sup> See: Ehsan Shariati, "Nayandishideh mandeh haye falsafi andisheh ye mo'alem Shariati" ("The Philosophical Unthoughts of the Thought of Teacher Shariati"), in *dar hashiyeh matn (On the Margins of the Text)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Shahr-e Aftab, 1379/2000).

<sup>67</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Safar-e bozorg" ("The Big Journey"), *Mehraab* no. 1 special issue Rendezvous with Shariati, 1359/1980, 16.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Post-Islamist Trends in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011), 102.

<sup>70</sup> Sara Shariati, "Dar bareh shara'iet-e emkan-e moderniteh dini," ("On the Conditions for the Possibility of Religious Modernity"), in *dar hashiyeh matn (On the Margins of the Text)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Shahr-e Aftab, 1379/2000), 162. Also see: "Erfan, barabari, azadi beh masabeh yek projeh" ("Spirituality, Equality, Freedom as a Project"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date), <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=626> (accessed 22 December 2012).

<sup>71</sup> In *Iqbal and Us* Shariati argues that a phase of guided democracy might be necessary for genuine democratic transition in "tribal" societies (Shariati, *Iqbal and Us*, 48). As Alijani notes,

political discourse by explicitly supporting electoral democracy as a mechanism for bottom-up social and political change. According to Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, even though the young Shariati was right in diagnosing the challenges of the transition to democracy in post-colonial societies, he was wrong in the prescription that a revolutionary class of intellectuals can facilitate the social and political transformation of a society by occupying positions of power.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Ehsan Shariati argues, "the problem with the thesis of 'guided democracy' is that democracy cannot be suspended in order to raise a democratic consciousness. Practicing democracy is itself a mechanism for raising awareness."<sup>73</sup>

In their critical re-reading of Shariati's discourse on intellectual leadership, neo-Shariatis have primarily emphasized the cultural and civil aspects of intellectual responsibility. According to Rahmani, in post-revolutionary Iran, Shariati's thought must be expanded in a "civil" direction through civil society engagement and activism.<sup>74</sup> In his view, to continue Shariati's unfinished project requires not only the cultural project of restructuring traditional and religious thought, but also the civil project of developing grassroots organizations and

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however, Shariati does not regard Iran to be a tribal society. Therefore, it would be mistaken to interpret this reference as Shariati's endorsement of a political model in Iranian society based on guided democracy or dictatorship of the proletariat.

<sup>72</sup> Hassan Yousefi-Eshkevari, "Pasokhi beh pendar-hay-e Akbar Ganji dar mored-e ali shariati" ("A Response to Akbar Ganji's Assumptions about Ali Shariati"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date), <http://drshariati.org/show.asp?id=97> (accessed 3 March 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Zamaneh Shariati-e pesar sakht-tar ast" ("The Times are Harder for Shariati the Son"), interview with Samina Rastegari, *Etemaad* no. 1992, 13 Tir 1388/4 July 2009, <http://www.etemaad.ir/Released/88-04-13/150.htm> (accessed 7 June 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Taghi Rahmani, "Zaban Soroush, zaban-e tanafor" ("The Language of Hate in Soroush's Discourse"), interview with Hossein Sokhanvar, *Etemaad* no. 1927, 27 Farvardin 1388/17 April 2009, <http://www.etemaad.ir/Released/88-01-27/256.htm> (accessed 7 June 2012).

facilitating the organic emergence of a pluralistic and participatory civil society.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Ehsan Shariati argues that advancing Shariati's unfinished project requires not only a philosophical and intellectual approach, but also sustained civil society activism.<sup>76</sup> According to him, the political responsibility of intellectuals is not one of gaining and remaining in power. Instead, he argues, the political responsibility of intellectuals is to contribute to the sustaining and strengthening of democratic structures that can protect political pluralism, toleration towards different beliefs, and rotation in office.<sup>77</sup>

Other aspects of Shariati's thought have also been subject to critique and revision by the neo-Shariatis. Taghi Rahmani, for example, has questioned whether the thesis of "Islamic Protestantism" is to be regarded as a central component of Shariati's discourse of indigenous modernity. According to Rahmani, while Shariati saw the Protestant Reformation as a prelude to modernity in Europe, his analysis did not give adequate attention to the link between this historical experience and subsequent developments such as the rise of religious fundamentalism and the privatization of religion in modern Western societies.<sup>78</sup> Ehsan Shariati too acknowledges that in appealing to the experiences of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, Shariati "overlooked some of the

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<sup>75</sup> Taghi Rahmani, "Dar rastay-e moderniteh sharghi" ("Toward an Eastern Modernity"), *Iran-e Farda* 6, no. 34, Tir 1376/July 1997, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Goftegooye rooznameh etemaad."

<sup>77</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Bar-e digar enghelaab, yaad-avar enghelab" (Once More Revolution, A Reminder of Revolution), *Shargh*, 18 bahman 1389/7 February 2011, [http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=318#post\\_3691](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=318#post_3691) (accessed 19 May 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Taghi Rahmani, "Protestantism va fahm-e Shariati az aan: goftegooy-e Susan Shariati va Taghi Rahmani" ("Protestantism and Shariati's Understanding of It: A Conversation between Susan Shariati and Taghi Rahmani"), interview with Lotfollah Meisami, *Cheshmendaaz Iran* 65, Day-Bahman 1389/January-February 2011, <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=472> (accessed 17 September 2012).

consequences of modernity in the West." He nevertheless points to Shariati's critique of the bourgeois orientation of European Protestantism and argues that "Shariati was more interested in the methodology of Protestant Reformation than in its content and essence."<sup>79</sup>

Another important way in which neo-Shariatis have gone beyond Shariati's immediate discourse is their increased attention and explicit endorsement of the concepts of universal human rights, minority rights, and individual rights and freedoms. While Shariati is not entirely inattentive to these concepts, his discourse is nevertheless more oriented toward positive rights and freedoms than negative or liberal ones. In the post-revolution context, and faced with the widespread and systematic violation of human rights under the rule of the Islamic Republic, however, Shariati's intellectual followers have sought to advance a contextually grounded defence of human and citizenship rights and liberties. Among others, Ehsan Shariati makes a case that commitment to a comprehensive "universal standard" of human rights can serve as a shared quest that connects anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles to the struggles against domestic forms of despotism and tyranny. Noting that the realization of human rights requires not only legal and political guarantees and provisions, but also public awareness and popular mobilization, Ehsan Shariati argues that the prophetic mission of intellectuals in the modern world includes advancing "a universal language" of rights that transcends geographical boundaries and brings together various popular struggles from the anti-globalization movements in

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<sup>79</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab, no date (unpublished).

Europe and North America to the anti-occupation movement in the Palestinian Territories. According to Ehsan Shariati, at the core of the concept of universal human rights is the idea of innate human dignity (*shakhsiat-e ensaani*). Far from being alien to and incompatible with a religious ontology, he argues, the latter idea is rooted in the unitarian (*tawhidi*) ontology of monotheistic religions and thus a religious/spiritual worldview can help to foster social commitment to the protection and defence of human dignity in modern public life.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, in post-revolutionary Iran some leading neo-Shariati figures have gone beyond Shariati by seeking to articulate a contextually grounded discourse of women's rights and gender equality. Prominent neo-Shariatis, including Susan Shariati and Reza Alijani, acknowledge that while Shariati was among the first religious reformers in Iran to draw attention to the role of women in popular movements and in the processes of social and political change, his discourse fell short of addressing specific issues regarding the status of women in religion and the question of gender equality. According to Susan Shariati, for example, Shariati discusses the question of women not as a distinct and independent issue, but rather in relation to the broader processes of the negotiation of individual subjectivity and social and political agency in Iranian society. As a result, she suggests, Shariati's discourse addresses the general question of the emancipation of women without engaging with with specific

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<sup>80</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Goftegoo, hoghoogh-e bashar: rahyabi va rahkar" ("Dialogue, Human Rights: Approaches and Methods"), Shariati Discourse Forum (no date), <http://talar.shandel.info/pdf/ehsan1003.pdf> (accessed 3 August 2012).

and concrete concerns such as women's rights in the family, in marriage and divorce, and in the workplace.<sup>81</sup>

In his effort to contribute to the development of an indigenous discourse of gender equality in post-revolutionary Iran, Alijani draws on Shariati's historical-inspiration approach toward religious thought and doctrines. He argues that while it remains an undeniable reality that various Islamic teachings and several verses in the Quran place women in a lower status than men, a historical-inspiration approach can help to show that first, these teachings and verses are not representative of Islam's general egalitarian and anti-domination orientation, and second, that certain aspects of religious teachings (including on the question of women) may no longer correspond to the objective realities and shared experiences and knowledges of contemporary human societies. As such, Alijani calls on religious reformers to distinguish between Islam's historically specific teachings on the question of women and the religion's general orientation within its particular historical context, and to use that general orientation as a source of inspiration for advancing a new discourse of gender equality in contemporary Muslim societies.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Susan Shariati, "Zanan dar projeh Shariati" ("Women in Shariati's Project"), interview with Parvin Bakhtiamejad, *Etemaad*, 15 Aban 1386/6 November 2007, <http://drshariati.org/show.asp?id=106> (accessed April 17 2011). Also see: Susan Shariati, "Chand kalameh harf-e zananeh: beh bahaney rooz-e jahani-e zan" ("A Few Feminine Words: On the Occasion of the International Women's Day"), in Susan Shariati, *Don kishot dar shahr (Don Quixote in the City)* (Tehran: Rasesh, 1388/2010): 235-238.

<sup>82</sup> See : Reza Alijani, "Din, zan, va donyay-e jadid: goftegoo ba Reza Alijani" ("Religion, Women, and the Modern World: A Conversation with Reza Alijani"), *Cheshmendaaz-e Iran* no. 44, Tir-Mordad 1386/July-August 2007, 99-108; Reza Alijani, "Jonbesh zanan: jonbeshi mostaghel ama mortabet" ("Women's Movement: Independence and Interdependence"), *Baztab-e Andisheh* no. 70, Bahman 1384/February 2006, 57-59; Reza Alijani, "Chera zan dar matoon moghadas?" ("Why the Question of Woman in Sacred Texts?"), Shariati Discourse Forum (no date),



Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari is another leading neo-Shariati figure who has been particularly attentive to the issue of women's rights and gender equality in post-revolutionary Iran. Yousefi Eshkevari, who was trained as a Shi'i cleric but was defrocked in 2002 by the Special Clerical Court due in part to his views on the rights and status of women in Islam, calls for a radical reconstruction of Islamic *fiqh* (in both Shi'i and Sunni traditions) in such areas as "family, women's rights, relations between men and women, hijab, inheritance ..., custody of children."<sup>83</sup> Yousefi Eshkevari criticizes theological views that allow polygamy for men, regard the father (or even grandfather) as the guardian or custodian of the child, prevent women from occupying top legal and political positions, and give men a bigger share of inheritance than women.<sup>84</sup> He also rejects the idea that compulsory veiling is sanctioned by Islam and defends the right of Iranian women to choose their attire.<sup>85</sup> He argues that all laws regarding the status and rights of women in Muslim traditions, even those that are based directly on Quranic references and teachings, are "mutable ... by their very nature."<sup>86</sup> Like Alijani, Yousefi Eshkevari believes that while religion can provide a general moral/ethical orientation in social and political life, laws must reflect not unchanging religious

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[http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=683&pid=3036#post\\_3035](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=683&pid=3036#post_3035) (accessed 2 July 2011); Reza Alijani, "Motoon-e moghadas va doniaye jadid" ("Sacred Scriptures and the Modern World"), Shariati Discourse Forum (no date), [http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=683&pid=3036#post\\_3036](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=683&pid=3036#post_3036) (accessed 2 July 2011).

<sup>83</sup> Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Women's Rights and the Women's Movement," in Ziba Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, 165. Also see: Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Reformist Islam and Modern Society," in Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, 163.

<sup>84</sup> See: Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Rethinking Men's Authority over Women: "Qiwāma, "Wilāya" and Their Underlying Assumptions," trans. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, in *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law: Justice and Ethics in the Islamic Legal Tradition*, edited by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen, and Christian Moe, 191-213, London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Yousefi Eshkevari, "Women's Rights," 169.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

dogma but rather the prevailing social realities and values.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, he argues that to advance women's rights in the context of Iranian society it is not enough to resort to legislative reform at the parliamentary level. Achieving gender equality, in his view, also requires a fundamental change in sociocultural attitudes and relations. Like other neo-Shariatis, Yousefi Eshkevari believes that by rethinking the whole idea of Muslimness religious reformers can pave the path toward a bottom-up negotiation and consolidation of equal gender relations.<sup>88</sup>

#### *NEGOTIATING MODERNITY AND SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY IRAN*

While neo-Shariatis acknowledge historical and ongoing efforts by secular and leftist discourses to negotiate indigenous accounts of an Iranian modernity, they nevertheless believe that Shariati's culturally and socially grounded discourse has deeper roots and enjoys broader popular support in Iranian society. According to Taghi Rahmani, whereas pre-revolution leftist and secular discourses on modernity often neglected the prevailing traditional beliefs, norms, and social relations and institutions, religious reformers like Shariati were successful in popularizing their discourse precisely because of their engagement with those traditions.<sup>89</sup> For neo-Shariatis negotiating an indigenous and bottom-up discourse of modernity in post-revolutionary Iran requires reviving and advancing Shariati's unfinished project of restructuring traditional and religious thought.<sup>90</sup> They believe that religion continues to be one of most important aspects of public life in

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<sup>87</sup> Yousefi Eshkevari, "Women's Rights," 164-5.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 171-172.

<sup>89</sup> Rahmani, "Dar rastay-e moderniteh sharghi."

<sup>90</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Nayandishideh mandeh haye falsafi," 10-11.

contemporary Iranian society and conclude that the path to sociopolitical development inevitably goes through the gates of religious reformation.

According to Sara Shariati, while there may be no consensus about the extent to which the contemporary Iranian society remains religious, "religion is nevertheless present in every aspect of the [Iranian] social life."<sup>91</sup> She argues that the overarching social presence of religion necessitates a project of religious reform that attends to the public role and social functions of religion.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Reza Alijani holds that while the social roles and functions of religion in Iranian society have undergone a number of changes in the recent decades, religion continues to be the most important component of the Iranian identity. According to him, the continued public presence of religion and the rise of the Islamic state in post-revolutionary Iran have made the task of critiquing and restructuring religious thought more urgent than before. In Alijani's view, continuing the unfinished project of rationalization and secularization of traditional religious thought can contribute to the quest for social and political democratization in the contemporary Iranian society.<sup>93</sup> He argues that Shariati's followers can help to enhance the conditions for the emergence of an "Iranian indigenous modernity" by giving simultaneous attention to the emancipatory aspects of modernity and

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<sup>91</sup> Sara Shariati, "Karbord-e farhang" ("The Function of Culture"), 17 April 2011, Sara Shariati Internet Archives, [http://sarahshariati.blogspot.ca/2011/04/blog-post\\_5280.html](http://sarahshariati.blogspot.ca/2011/04/blog-post_5280.html) (accessed 25 February 2013). Also see: Sara Shariati, "Din-e ma va dine anhaa" ("Our Religion and Their Religion"), Kanoon-e Arman-e Shariati (no date), <http://www.slideshare.net/sco1385/ss-1759330> (accessed 13 July 2013).

<sup>92</sup> Sara Sharaiti, "Eslaah dini beh masaabeh eslaah ejtemaaei?" ("Religious Reform as Social Reform?") Sara Shariati Internet Archives (17 April 2011), [http://sarahshariati.blogspot.ca/2011/04/blog-post\\_3728.html](http://sarahshariati.blogspot.ca/2011/04/blog-post_3728.html) (accessed 6 February 2013).

<sup>93</sup> Reza Alijani, "Shariati dar bastar sonati gozashteh va jameh-e motakaser konooni" ("Shariati in his Traditional Social Context and our Pluralistic Contemporary Society"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date) <http://www.alishariati.ir/show/?id=205> (accessed 14 May 2012).

the progressive social and inspirational capacities of the existing local cultural traditions.<sup>94</sup>

In post-revolutionary Iran, neo-Shariatis have contributed to the continued restructuring of Islamic thought primarily by focusing their attention on the critique of cultural essentialism in traditionalist, Islamist, and fundamentalist religious discourses. While these discourses often claim to represent the authentic voice of tradition, the neo-Shariati critique emphasizes the hybridity of traditional and cultural identity and the historical and philosophical unsustainability of identitarian discourses.<sup>95</sup> According to Sara Shariati, for example, whether they are manifested in nationalist/ethnic terms or in religious terms, identitarian discourses often seek to achieve an impossible objective of "restoring a lost past" by utilizing force and violence.<sup>96</sup> In her view, these discourses see the global expansion of Western modernity as a threat to local historical-cultural identities and resist the hegemonic force of modernity by turning to familiar cultural and national sources of collective identity. Thus, she argues, rather than being an authentic representation of tradition, cultural essentialism is in fact "a product of the hegemony of the modern condition."<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Ehsan Shariati argues that despite their appeal to tradition, identitarian discourses are in fact creations of the

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<sup>94</sup> Reza Alijani, "Shariati va naghadi-e sonnat" ("Shariati and the Critique of Tradition"), *Iran-e Farda* no. 4, Tir 1377/July 1998, 22.

<sup>95</sup> Sara Shariati, "Chehreh jahani-gar, chehreh jahani-zadeh: siyasat jahani kardan va ravand tarikhi jahani shodan" ("The Globalizer Face and the Globalized Face: An Evaluation of Globalizing Policies and the Process of Globalization"), in *Khodkavi-e melli dar asr-e jahani shodan (National Self-Examination in the Age of Globalization)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Ghasidehsara, 1381/2002), 149-159.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>97</sup> Sara Shariati, "Dar bareh shariat-e emkan-e moderniteh dini," 133.

modern world that turn religious, traditional, and/or national/ethnic identity into modern sites of resistance against the universalist claims of Western modernity.<sup>98</sup>

Neo-Shariatis have further contributed to the modern restructuring of religious doctrines by advancing a rigorous critique of Islamism, which became the prevailing discourse of power in post-revolutionary Iran. In particular, some neo-Shariati figures have focused their attention on critiquing the philosophical foundations of the religious state and the theological modes of legitimating political power. Alijani, for example, argues that similar to a "monarchy" in a "religious state" political power is made legitimate by reference to a divine or traditional right to rule, rather than the principle of popular sovereignty. According to Alijani, while the current constitution of the Islamic Republic allows for some democratic structures, the primary source of political legitimacy is divine authority rather than the right of the people. He argues that although Shariati saw Islam as a source of "inspiration" and "orientation" within the public sphere, he nevertheless opposed legitimating political authority by appealing to divine sovereignty. Instead, it is argued, Shariati regarded popular sovereignty as the only legitimate source for authorizing political power.<sup>99</sup>

According to Alijani, while Islamism treats religion and its system of laws and beliefs as the ultimate end of all human activity, in Shariati's thought "religion is only a means to a human end, not an end in itself." As such, he argues, whereas the former discourse implicitly and explicitly undermines human autonomy and

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<sup>98</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab.

<sup>99</sup> Reza Alijani, *Rend-e kham: Shariati-shenasi jeld-e yekom: zamaneh, zendegi, va arman-ha (The Pure Nonconformist: Shariatiology Volume One: Era, Life, and Ideals)* (Tehran: Ghalam 1387), 215.

individual rights and freedoms, the latter's humanist orientation emphasizes human freedom and acknowledges the innate dignity and rights of individuals. Shariati's point of entrance into social and political discussions, he contends, is the recognition of the respect and dignity of each person.<sup>100</sup> In "Pre-Secular Iranians in a Post-Secular Age," (2011) Alijani makes a case that contrary to Islamist discourses that reject the separation between religious and political power, Shariati's post-theological and humanist interpretation of Islamic thought is compatible with the modern notions of secularism and democracy. According to Alijani, "a Sharia-based religiosity, which seeks a religious state and perceives religious laws to be eternal, deterministic, and absolute," is inevitably incompatible with secularism. However, an interpretation of Islamic thought based on opposition to a "juridical, deterministic, and Sharia-centered approach to religion" rejects the legitimization of political authority through reference to the divine and recognizes the modern differentiation between the religious and the political.<sup>101</sup> According to Alijani, the "historical-inspirational" understanding of religion that Iqbal and Shariati advocated does not endorse a religious state and the rule of the Islamic Sharia. Instead, it emphasizes human reason, human responsibility, and individual agency and autonomy. Moreover, Alijani holds, this interpretation does not limit itself to the re-reading of the religious scripture,

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<sup>100</sup> Reza Alijani, interview by author (Internet/Skype), 20 November 2012.

<sup>101</sup> Reza Alijani, "Pre-secular Iranians in a Post-secular Age: The Death of God, the Resurrection of God," trans. Mojtaba Mahdavi and Siavash Saffari, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011), 31.

theology, and history, and instead draws on "a plurality of sources in human civilization (including science, art, gnosis, philosophy, etc)." <sup>102</sup>

In addition to their ongoing engagement with traditional and religious thought, neo-Shariatis have also sought to continue Shariati's radical deconstruction of modernity and his simultaneous attention to its emancipatory and oppressive aspects. For neo-Shariatis like Ehsan Shariati, the global expansion of modernity has inevitably affected the conditions and prospects of change around the world, and today it is futile to speak of local or national models of modernity and change without taking into account these transnational developments.<sup>103</sup> In examining what he regards as "the global condition" of modernity, Ehsan Shariati argues that "industrialization, integration of the global markets, and the globalization of capital and technology have already been imposed on all of us, and today all societies, even pre-capitalist ones, are affected by this modern condition."<sup>104</sup> In his view, a critical engagement with modernity requires simultaneous attention to its positives and negatives because both of these aspects "have already shaped the reality in which we now live." <sup>105</sup>

Like Shariati, neo-Shariatis often regard the recognition of individual agency and autonomy as the emancipatory core of modernity. According to Susan Shariati, for example, in its progressive function modernity is the emancipation of

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<sup>102</sup> Alijani, "Pre-secular Iranians in a Post-secular Age," 32.

<sup>103</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Ehsan az Shariati migooyad: dar goftegoo ba ham-mihan" ("Ehsan Talks about Shariati: In Conversation with Ham-Mihan") interview with Mohammad Ghouchani and Mehdi Ghani, *Ham-Mihan*, 29 Khordad 1386/19 June 2007, [http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=443#post\\_3089](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=443#post_3089) (accessed 11 January 2013). Also see: Ehsan Shariati, "Cheh cheshm-andaazi bara bahar-e arab?" ("What Prospects for the Arab Spring?"), *Rahnameh* (no date), <http://ehsanshariati.org/show/?id=60> (accessed 4 January 2013).

<sup>104</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

the individual from the traditional forces of "memory," "customs," and "determinism."<sup>106</sup> This, she argues, occurs in the course of the modern separation between religious and political power, the demystification of social relations, and the recognition of individual reason, autonomy, and creativity.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Ehsan Shariati regards "the emancipation of the individual" as the progressive essence of modernity and argues that the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the rise of "political-philosophical modernity in Europe" produced the conditions for freeing the subject from the "guardianship of the church" and the "unknowability of nature."<sup>108</sup> Distinguishing between "modernity" and "Westernization," he defines the former as a general condition that emancipates the individual from the bonds of determinism and enhances autonomous and critical thought. "Modernity," he argues, "means that you think independently of Western domination and guardianship. It means that you critique the West itself."<sup>109</sup>

According to Ehsan Shariati, to critique Western modernity means deconstructing monolithic abstractions such as the "West" and/or "modernity" and drawing attention to their plural manifestations. He argues that while Western modernity bears the cultural-civilizational legacy of Europe, this legacy itself consists of various contesting and contradictory experiences which can only constitute a cohesive whole when contrasted against another abstraction such as

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<sup>106</sup> Susan Shariati, "Dar mian-e do-gaaneh-haay-e teraajik: Shariati olgoo ya ravesheh" ("Between Tragic Binaries: Shariati, Model and Method"), *Shargh*, 29 Khordad 1386/19 June 2007, <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=36> (accessed 13 April 2011).

<sup>107</sup> Susan Shariati, "Dar mian-e do-gaaneh-haay-e teraajik."

<sup>108</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Ehsan az Shariati migooyad."

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



the "Orient."<sup>110</sup> Moreover, Ehsan Shariati argues that critiquing Western modernity requires distinguishing between its "early" and "late" phases. In its early or "young" phase, he contends, Western modernity displayed a "revolutionary, utopian, and humanist spirit" in its encounter with clerical and medieval tyranny. In its late or "mature" phase, however, Western modernity became an oppressive force of colonialism and exploitation.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, Ehsan Shariati argues that contemporary Western societies are faced with a range of sociopolitical, economic, environmental, and philosophical challenges or "cul-de-sacs," which must be taken into account in the course of the negotiation of modernity in non-Western societies.<sup>112</sup>

In critiquing really-existing Western modernity, neo-Shariatis draw on a range of critical discourses in the West, particularly the European left tradition. According to Ehsan Shariati, the Shariati/neo-Shariati critique of modernity finds much in common with the Marxist revolutionary tradition as well as the reformist discourses of the European social democratic tradition. In his view, Marx's analysis of economic formations and the relations of production revealed the processes through which the rise of industrial capitalism undermined individual agency and autonomy in modern societies. He argues that Marx's foundational "critique of the sociopolitical consequences of modernity" was ultimately a radical call for the democratization of the economic and social spheres through

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<sup>110</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Shekast-e tajadod talabi mashrooteh va naakaaramadi-e feki-e roshanfekraan mosalmaan" ("The Failure of Constitutionalist Modernism and the Ineffectiveness of Muslim Intellectuals") interview with Ruhollah Mohajeri, ILNA: Iranian Labor News Agency, 5 August 2010, <http://old.ilna.ir/newsContext.aspx?ID=138817> (accessed 7 October 2011).

<sup>111</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Shekast-e tajadod talabi."

<sup>112</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab.

revolutionary action. In this regard, Ehsan Shariati concludes, the Marxist revolutionary tradition today remains a much more radical critique of really-existing Western modernity than the reformist tradition of the European social-democratic thought which has sought to introduce an egalitarian dimension to liberalism.<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, Ehsan Shariati believes that both Marxism and the European social democratic tradition effectively remain within the rationalist/positivist paradigm of Enlightenment modernity. Referring to Marx's favourable views towards Enlightenment rationalism and his positive assessment of the consequences of colonialism in India and China, Ehsan Shariati argues that rather than presenting an alternative to Enlightenment modernity, Marxism constitutes "one of the multiple dimensions" of the really-existing modernity in the West.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, he holds that despite their reformist efforts, the continued commitment of European social democratic thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas to salvage the foundational tenets of the European Enlightenment has contributed to "the further integration of modernity and capitalism."<sup>115</sup>

Following the footsteps of Iqbal and Shariati, neo-Shariatis seek to radically deconstruct Enlightenment modernity and advance the search for an alternative worldview on the basis of which to negotiate an indigenous modernity for Muslim societies. In this critical engagement, neo-Shariatis draw attention to the cross-cultural and cross-civilizational make-up of what is generally regarded

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<sup>113</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

as the emancipatory core of Enlightenment modernity. For instance, while Ehsan Shariati acknowledges that the European Enlightenment marked an important break from the past by placing a rights-bearing modern subject at the center of its social and political thought, he nevertheless argues that the modern concepts of rights and citizenship are products of cross-civilizational encounters and exchanges between various Western and non-Western traditions.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, neo-Shariatis problematize Enlightenment modernity by highlighting the links between Enlightenment rationalism and the oppressive aspects of rally-existing modernity. Utilizing Foucauldian analysis, Ehsan Shariati makes a case that while the modern discourse of rationality initially sought to emancipate humanity from the bounds of traditionality, "in the modern era, 'rationality' itself became the new discourse of power that defines itself vis-à-vis an 'irrational' or 'mad' other and systematically seeks total domination over the other."<sup>117</sup>

According to neo-Shariatis, by advancing the efforts of Iqbal and Shariati to develop a religious/spiritual worldview on the basis of a modern restructuring of religious thought in Islam, contemporary Muslim reformers can contribute to the negotiation of a more humane modernity for Muslim societies than the really-existing Western models. In this endeavor, the neo-Shariatis have focused their

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<sup>116</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Shahrvand kist? shaharvandi chegooneh raftaarist?" ("Who is the Citizen? What Kind of Behavior is Citizenship?"), *Rahnameh* (no date), <http://ehsanshariati.org/show/?id=4> (accessed 14 August 2012). Ehsan Shariati believes that the contemporary concepts of rights and citizenship are made possible by the modern epistemological break and the recognition of the notion of natural human rights. He, nevertheless, argues that the modern epistemological break was itself preceded, among other things, by the historical evolution of the ideas of citizenship, equality, and freedom in various human civilizations. He points to the recognition of the Zoroastrian notions of justice and tolerance in ancient Iran, the historical experiences of citizenship in ancient Greece, and the evolution of the notion of the equality of all before God in monotheistic traditions.

<sup>117</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Goftegooye rooznameh Etemaad."

effort on theorizing an egalitarian and democratic discourse of sociopolitical development based on Shariati's triad of spirituality, equality, and freedom.

### *SPIRITUALITY, EQUALITY, FREEDOM*

For neo-Shariatis, the triad of spirituality, equality, and freedom that Shariati emphasized in the late phase of his life represents the essence of his sociopolitical thought and serves as a potential basis for a sustainable social and political project of indigenous modernity.<sup>118</sup> Shariati discussed this triad at some length in an essay titled "Spirituality, Equality, Freedom" (*erfan, barabari, azadi*), which was later included in the second volume of his collected works.<sup>119</sup> Shariati also made references to similar trios including "freedom, equality, self-consciousness," "socialism, existentialism, love," and "monotheism, justice, freedom."<sup>120</sup> He regarded the quest for these ideals as a universal value of a collective humanity and as a progressive force in human history.<sup>121</sup> In a letter addressed to his son, Ehsan, Shariati wrote:

The dearest and most glorious ideals of humanity for which millions upon millions have been martyred throughout history include: *monotheism*, which gives birth to spirituality, love, and dignity; *justice*, which replaces bigotry and domination with fairness and equality; and *freedom*, which emancipates humanity from the violence of tyrants and the cruelty of oppressors. A world

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<sup>118</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Shariati si-o seh saal bad" ("Shariati After Thirty Three Years"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date) <http://www.drshariati.org/show.asp?ID=171&q=> (accessed 9 September 2012). Also see: Ehsan Shariati, "Na-e bozorg" ("The Big No"), *Vijenaameh Yekomin Saalgard*, no. 1, Khordad 1357/June 1979, 56, footnote 6.

<sup>119</sup> See: Ali Shariati, *Revolutionary Self-Preparedness: Collected Works 2 (khodsaazi enghelabi: majmooh asaar 2)* (Tehran: Hossienieh Ershad, 1977).

<sup>120</sup> Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 135.

<sup>121</sup> Ali Shariati, "Erfan, barabari, azadi" ("Spirituality, Equality, Freedom"), 1355/1976, C.W. 2, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

based on these ideals is one in which all humans are equal, in solidarity, and free from the fear of oppression.<sup>122</sup>

For Shariati, spirituality, equality, and freedom were the indivisible tenets of all progressive and emancipatory movements in history. He argued that "humanity's biggest misfortune in the modern age is that its three universal ideals ... have been separated." In his view, "as long as these three ideals are disjointed, they are no more than empty promises; the realization of each one of them requires the presence of the other two."<sup>123</sup> The task of revolutionary intellectuals in the modern world, then, was "to wage an emancipatory cultural and intellectual struggle to save human *freedom* from the barren wastelands of capitalism and class exploitation, *equality* and justice from the violent and pharaonic dictatorship of Marxism, and *God* from the ghastly and gloomy graveyard of clericalism."<sup>124</sup> While Shariati believed that the quest for spirituality, freedom and equality had historically existed in all human societies, he nevertheless saw Islamic thought and its religious worldview as being uniquely positioned to develop a synthesis of these ideals. This, according to Shariati, was due to Islam's simultaneous attention to the material and the spiritual, the religion's recognition of individual reason and autonomy, and its egalitarian social orientation.<sup>125</sup>

In their effort to advance Shariati's unfinished project in post-revolutionary Iran, neo-Shariatis have sought to strengthen the sociopolitical and

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<sup>122</sup> Shariati, "Naameh beh Ehsan" 1355/1967-1968.

<sup>123</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 1, 79, quoted in Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 150.

<sup>124</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 1, 97-98, quoted in Masoomeh Aliakbari *Ghera-ati falsafi az yek zed-e filsoof: derang-haayii degar-andishaaneh dar matni bi-payan beh nam-e doctor Ali Shariati (A Philosophical Reading of an Anti-Philosopher: Alternative Reflections on an Endless Text Called Dr. Ali Shariati)* (Tehran: Ghalam, 1386/2007), 156.

<sup>125</sup> See: Shariati, "Erfan, barabari, azadi."

philosophical substance of his spirituality-equality-freedom triad. According to Reza Alijani, while Shariati emphasized the triad as the universal values of a common humanity his discourse fell short of providing specific and systematic models for putting the ideas into practice.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, Ehsan Shariati argues that advancing Shariati's discourse requires clearly defining what it means for spirituality to have an active role in modern public life. In his view, European social-democratic thought has already resolved the perceived tension between the modern concepts of "equality" and "freedom." The challenge, therefore, is to show that spirituality too can serve as a basis for a progressive social and political project without undermining the modern separation between religious and state power.<sup>127</sup>

Seeking to define the public role of spirituality in the modern world, neo-Shariatis have highlighted aspects of Shariati's religious worldview which they argue can contribute to the negotiation of a more humane modernity than the really-existing Western models. In Reza Alijani's view, Shariati's "spiritual humanism" serves as the ontological basis for his radical critique of Enlightenment modernity. Drawing parallels between the spiritual ethos of Shariati and Mahatma Gandhi, he argues that for both men public spirituality is a strong impetus for the recognition of difference, respect for the other, and for solidarity with the marginalized and the oppressed.<sup>128</sup> Neo-Shariatis further argue that Shariati's spiritual worldview seeks to establish a new relationship between

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<sup>126</sup> Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 193.

<sup>127</sup> "Erfan, barabari, azadi beh masabeh yek projeh" ("Spirituality, Equality, Freedom as a Project"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date), <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=626> (accessed 22 December 2012).

<sup>128</sup> Reza Alijani, interview by author.

the modern subject and its others. According to Susan Shariati, for example, in contrast to the Enlightenment's positivist worldview in which human subjectivity is attained through the dominance of the self over its others, Shariati's spiritual worldview seeks to give recognition to both the self and the other and "to make possible the experience of togetherness."<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Ehsan Shariati argues that for Shariati spirituality is in fact "a type of awareness based on the experience of unity between the self and the meaning of existence." Spirituality, in this view, is not a rejection of rationality but rather a "rational critique" of the condition of "human alienation" in a world shaped by modern economic, political, and cultural relations of domination.<sup>130</sup>

In the post-1979 revolution Iran, neo-Shariatis have distinguished Shariati's emphasis on public religion and spirituality from Islamism and its call for the establishment of an Islamic state, the rule of Islamic law, and the Islamization of all spheres of social life. According to Alijani, unlike Islamists Shariati did not believe that religious tradition should serve as a basis for regulating modern life. Instead, he argues, Shariati's "historical-inspirational" approach to Islamic thought called for "a *thin progressive* conception of religion in 'all' spheres."<sup>131</sup> This approach also distinguishes Shariati's discourse from secular and liberal-Islamic discourses that call for the privatization of religion.

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<sup>129</sup> Susan Shariati, "Paradox-haay-e vojdan-e asheghaneh dar negah-e Shariati" ("The Paradoxes of the Loving Consciousness in Shariati's Thought"), *Madreseh* no. 3, Ordibehesht 1385/May 2006, <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=123> (accessed 2 March 2011).

<sup>130</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Manaviat dar sepehr-e omoomi: dar astaneh sio panjomin saliyad amoozgare 'erfan, azadi, barabari'" ("Spirituality in the Public Sphere: On the Thirty Fifth Anniversary of the Teacher of 'Spirituality, Freedom, and Equality'") *Etemaad* no. 2421, 28 Khordad 1391/17 June 2012, <http://www.etemadnewspaper.ir/Released/91-03-28/226.htm#204247> (accessed 0 December 2012).

<sup>131</sup> Alijani, "Pre-secular Iranians in a Post-secular Age," 28 (emphasis in original).

According to Alijani, in post-revolutionary Iran the hegemony of Islamism has given rise to various discourses calling for minimal or private religion and a total separation between the religious and the political spheres. Nevertheless, he notes, the experiences of Iran and other Muslim societies in recent decades reveal that the attempt to privatize religion often undermines the bottom-up negotiation of modernity and gives rise to identitarian religious discourses. Thus, he argues, what needs to be done is to continue Shariati's project of the total restructuring of Islamic tradition, and "to present a *thin progressive* conception of religion in which religion is a source of 'vision,' 'value,' and 'orientation,' not a blue-print or a system of law."<sup>132</sup>

In distinguishing Shariati's discourse from Islamist discourses, his followers also highlight his emphasis on human freedom and democratic ideals. According to neo-Shariatis, contrary to what some of his critics argue, Shariati's critique of Western liberal democracy did not amount to a rejection of individual agency, rights, and freedoms. Ehsan Shariati believes that Shariati problematized really-existing Western liberal democracies without rejecting the basic and minimum guarantees of individual rights and freedoms that "political liberalism" has historically championed.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Sara Shariati contends that Shariati's critique of liberal-democracy is not a rejection of democracy, but rather a critique of the erosion of the genuine ideals of freedom and democracy in really-existing Western capitalist democracies.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Alijani, "Pre-secular Iranians in a Post-secular Age," 28 (emphasis in original).

<sup>133</sup> Ehsan Shariati, "Goftegooye rooznameh Etemaad."

<sup>134</sup> Sara Shariati, "Dar bareh shara'iet-e emkan-e moderniteh dini," 158.



In the second volume of his collected works, Shariati himself makes explicit references to basic democratic rights and freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of political activity.<sup>135</sup> However, Shariati's discussions on the subject are generally focused on the condition of freedom rather than specific rights and freedoms that citizens can enjoy in modern democratic societies. And although he acknowledges the need to protect negative freedoms, Shariati's conception of freedom is intimately linked to the concept of self-determination and positive freedom. According to Ehsan Shariati, while Shariati endorsed "negative freedoms" he was also concerned with "maximal freedoms" that facilitate the transition to direct democracy and "a system of commons" in which centralized governance disappears.<sup>136</sup> Drawing parallels between Shariati's political ideals and the European anarchist and social-libertarian traditions, Ehsan Shariati argues that "Shariati's utopian governance model is one in which decentralization of power is achieved through a system of co-operatives (*nezam-e shorayee*).\" Nevertheless, he also argues that as a "pragmatic utopian" Shariati sought to identify "practical" sociopolitical and intellectual-cultural approaches for moving towards the realization of such ideals in the face of existing realities and available resources.<sup>137</sup>

Finally, in revisiting Shariati's project in post-revolutionary Iran and in their attempt to distinguish his discourse from other Islamic discourses of

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<sup>135</sup> Ali Shariati, "Azadi, khojasteh azadi," ("Freedom, Joyous Freedom"), (no date), C.W. 2, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>136</sup> "Mizgerd-e nasim-e bidari dar barresi amoozesh-hay-e shariati" ("Nasim-e Bidari's Panel on Shariati's Teachings"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date) <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=212> (accessed 27 July 2012).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. Also see: Ehsan Shariati, "Goftegooye rooznameh Etemaad."

indigenous modernity, neo-Shariatis have highlighted the egalitarian orientation of Shariati's political thought.<sup>138</sup> This orientation is evident both in Shariati's engagement with the European left tradition as well as in his particular reading of Islam's religious doctrines. In *Iqbal and Us*, Shariati writes: "The ultimate objective of Islam is the global realization of justice and equality .... Islam's philosophy of history is the inevitable emancipation of the poor, the exploited, and the wretched of the world and their final rule on Earth."<sup>139</sup> According to Alijani, in Shariati's thought the ideal of equality represents not only economic egalitarianism but also a general anti-domination orientation in all spheres.<sup>140</sup> He contends that for Shariati, Islam's egalitarianism endorses the modern concepts of equality of all individuals, equal political rights, economic equality, and gender equality.<sup>141</sup> According to Alijani, by placing egalitarian concerns at the center of its discourse of indigenous modernity Shariati's project becomes particularly attentive to the concerns of the poor and the working classes. By contrast, he argues, while Islamic liberalism has contributed to the negotiation of a contextually grounded discourse of political pluralism and civil and political rights in post-revolutionary Iran, it has nevertheless neglected the issues of equality and social welfare.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, Rahmani points out that whereas religious reform discourses in post-revolutionary Iran often privilege freedom

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<sup>138</sup> "Shariati va goftemaan-e edalat" ("Shariati and the Discourse of Justice"), Ali Shariati Information Center, 23 Azar 1390/14 December 2011, <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=539> (accessed 5 March 202).

<sup>139</sup> Ali Shariati "Iqbal mosleh-e gham-e akhir" (Iqbal the Reformer of the Present Time) Ordibehesht 1349/May 1970, C.W. 5, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>140</sup> Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 137.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>142</sup> Reza Alijani, "Tashaio sorkh, ya tashaio seh-rang-e irani" ("Red Shi'ism or Tricolored Iranian Shi'ism"), *Iran-e Farda* no. 34, Tir 1376/July 1997, 31.

over equality, advancing the egalitarian and social-democratic aspects of Shariati's thought can contribute to the ongoing struggles in Iranian society by giving simultaneous attention to sociopolitical and socioeconomic concerns.<sup>143</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While some of Shariati's secular critics continue to see his Islamic discourse as being contrary to the universal notions of modernity and progress, the analytical frameworks of public religion and multiple modernities make possible alternative readings of Shariati's social and political thought. Even though in its descriptive function Shariati's thought shares some common-ground with these two frameworks, in its normative turn Shariati's radical Islamic discourse is also a call for action and bottom-up change in cultural, social, political, and economic relations. Like the analyses of a range of commentators who have contributed to the development of the frameworks of public religion and multiple modernities, Shariati's thought draws attention to the capacities of cultural traditions in the ongoing processes of social and political change. In its normative function, however, Shariati's discourse also emphasizes intellectual commitment, social and political engagement, and grassroots activism. Furthermore, while Shariati believes that cultural and civilizational diversity makes possible the negotiation of diverse experiences of modernity, he is also attentive to hegemony and global power asymmetries in the modern world. In his radical critique of colonial and

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<sup>143</sup> "Mizgerd-e nasim-e bidari."

neo-colonial relations of domination, Shariati challenges the hegemonic expansion of two particular socioeconomic and sociopolitical formations, namely, capitalism and liberal-democracy, in the course of the expansion of European modernity.

Expanding on Shariati's simultaneous critique of tradition and modernity in the post-revolution context, neo-Shariatis have developed an egalitarian and democratic vision of indigenous modernity that draws on both inspirational and mobilizational capacities of religion. By advancing Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity neo-Shariatis have also contributed to the simultaneous deconstruction of the universalist discourses of modernism and secularism, and the particularist discourses of Islamism and traditionalism. As the previous chapter showed, in advocating a third way between these two extremes, neo-Shariati thought finds common ground with other contemporary reformist discourses including the Islamic-liberalism discourse of Abdolkarim Soroush. Despite some overlaps, however, neo-Shariati thought can be distinguished from the reformist discourses of Soroush and other prominent Muslim liberals in a number of ways. As discussed earlier, while in post-revolutionary Iran Islamic-liberalism has focused primarily on advocating individual civil and political rights and freedoms, neo-Shariatis have sought to combine concern with sociopolitical rights with attention to socioeconomic justice.

Moreover, the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of public spirituality is a direct challenge to the call for "minimal religion" by Soroush and other leading

figures of Islamic-liberalism.<sup>144</sup> For neo-Shariatis such as Sara Shariati and Reza Alijani, the discourse of minimal religion is ultimately a conservative discourse aimed at protecting religion from the modern forces of social and political change.<sup>145</sup> According to Sara Shariati, in Soroush's political thought religion contributes to the process of democratization "not by reforming its historical tradition, but rather by withdrawing from the social realm."<sup>146</sup> She argues that in a society where religion remains present in every aspect of social life, it is not sufficient to simply advance a religious discourse of indigenous modernity through hermeneutics and theological-philosophical debates. Instead, she notes, what is needed is to attend to the social presence and functions of religion and the

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<sup>144</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, while Soroush criticizes Shariati for ideologization and politicization of Islamic doctrines, he does not reject the idea of public religiosity. A case might be made, however, that critiquing Soroush's "liberal" Islam in contemporary Iran serves a similar function for neo-Shariatis that critiquing Shariati's radical and leftist Islam did for Soroush, as well as for a number of other Iranian religious intellectuals, during the 1990s. In some of his works in this period including, *Sturdier Than Ideology (Farbeh-tar az ideology)* (1993), and *The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of Religion: The Theory of the Evolution of Religious Knowledge (Qabz va bast-e teorik-e shariat – ya nazariyeh-ye takamol-e marefat-e dini)* (1994), Soroush aimed to distinguish his particular (minimal) brand of public religiosity from what he saw as a maximal and totalizing public religiosity that was articulated by Shariati in pre-revolution Iran and implemented by Iran's Islamist rulers in the post-revolutionary period. In a somewhat similar fashion, over the course of the last decade, and in a different social context, neo-Shariatis have sought to differentiate their own discourse of indigenous modernity from Soroush's discourse precisely by highlighting the emancipatory capacities of politicized and radicalized public religiosity in a bottom-up movement toward democratic reform in Iran. Moreover, as this and other chapters have discussed, in differentiating their own discourses from that of Soroush, neo-Shariatis have also placed emphasis on the egalitarian and emancipatory aspects of Shariati's thought.

<sup>145</sup> Sara Sharaiti, interview by author (telephone), 28 November 2012; Alijani, interview by author. Also see: Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Reformist Islam and Modern Society," in Ziba Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 155-163. Yousefi Eshkevari argues that while Muslim liberals including Soroush and his intellectual followers are more inclined toward "private Islam," the social-democratic orientation represented by Shariati's intellectual followers "sees Islam as a social movement and wants to bring about social reforms in Muslim societies by means of a social and reformist Islam" (162-163).

<sup>146</sup> Sara Sharaiti, "Eslaah dini beh masaabeh eslaah ejtemaaei?". Also see: Rahmani, "zaban Soroush, zaban-e tanafor."

objective conditions of the religious masses.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, Alijani believes that in the context of Iranian society the discourse of private or minimal religion has already proven to be unsustainable. In his view, any attempt toward limiting religion within the private and the individual sphere ultimately undermines the objective of reforming and restructuring the public presence of religion and leads to the rise of religious fanaticism and conservatism. Alijani also argues that while Shariati's discourse advances a radical critique of the theologically-based interpretations of Islam in all spheres, the discourses of private and/or minimal religion effectively leaves theological discourses unchallenged within the private sphere.<sup>148</sup>

For Shariati and neo-Shariatis the social and inspirational capacities of public spirituality can contribute to the negotiation of a more humane modernity for Iran and other Muslim societies than the prevailing Western-centric models. In their critical engagement with Enlightenment modernity, they argue that the philosophical crisis of Western modernity is essentially the crisis of the modern self. As such, in developing their particular discourse of indigenous modernity, Shariati and neo-Shariatis also seek to negotiate a response to modernity's philosophical crisis. The following chapter focuses on the philosophical foundations of the Shariati/neo-Shariati theory of indigenous modernity and its spiritual ontology. The chapter argues that in its critical engagement with Enlightenment modernity, the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse responds to the philosophical crisis of the modern self by locating individual autonomy within a

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<sup>147</sup> Sara Sharaiti, "Eslaah dini beh masaabeh eslaah ejtemaaei?"; Sara Sharaiti, interview.

<sup>148</sup> Alijani, interview.

spiritual/religious worldview and redefining the relationship between the self and its others through a mediated account of subjectivity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ENLIGHTENMENT SUBJECT AND THE 'ISLAMIC DISCOURSE' OF ALI SHARIATI

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter examined the development of a contextually grounded discourse of secularism and egalitarian democracy in the political thought of Ali Shariati and a number of leading neo-Shariati thinkers. It was argued that contrary to the Eurocentric discourses of modernity that pay inadequate attention to the role of local traditional/religious resources in the modern processes of sociopolitical change, the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse draws on both social and inspirational capacities of the Islamic tradition in developing a discourse of indigenous modernity. A case was made that in their attempt to advance a discourse of indigenous modernity in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran, Shariati and neo-Shariatis have treated religion as a major (albeit not the only) perpetual and multilingual source of identity and inspiration in Iranian society. In this chapter I turn to the philosophical foundations of Shariati's thought, with a focus on the relationship between religious ontology and the modern notion of human subjectivity. Is a religious ontology inherently incompatible with the idea of an autonomous rights-bearing subject, as some of Shariati's critics argue? Or, can the emancipation of the modern subject be negotiated through an ontology in which



God occupies a central place, as Shariati and his contemporary followers seem to believe?

As Chapter One pointed out, it was only in the second decade after his death and with the increased interest in examining his encounter with modernity that commentators began to pay closer attention to the theoretical and philosophical foundations of Shariati's thought. In these theoretical/philosophical examinations, commentators have been particularly interested in the relationship between Shariati's religious discourse and a range of modern concepts including human agency, individual freedom, equal rights, and popular sovereignty. Shahrough Akhavi's 1988 essay entitled "Islam, Politics and Society in the Thought of Ayatullah Khomeini, Ayatullah Taliqani and Ali Shariati," appears to be the first systematic effort to examine the ontological and epistemological grounds of Shariati's Islamic discourse. According to Akhavi, Shariati's philosophical thought is founded, on the one hand, on a deep belief in "free will" and human "autonomy," and on the other hand, on an "integralist worldview (*jahanbini-yi tawhidi*)" based on the fusion of God, humanity, and nature.<sup>149</sup> He argues that Shariati did not see a contradiction between unity and autonomy and spent much of his time defending the free exercise of human will.<sup>150</sup> For Akhavi, Shariati's support for human free will is particularly evident in his philosophy of history and his belief that while physical and scientific laws may limit the scope

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<sup>149</sup> Shahrough Akhavi, "Islam, Politics and Society in the Thought of Ayatullah Khomeini, Ayatullah Taliqani and Ali Shariati," *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 4 (October 1988), 406. In this dissertation I have translated *jahanbini-yi tawhidi* to "unitarian worldview," which I find to be a more accurate equivalence than "integralist worldview." Other commentators have also used the phrase "monotheistic worldview."

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

of individual action, individual humans have a "wide latitude" in exercising their free will and shaping the development of history.<sup>151</sup> Akhavi further argues that though his ontology was rooted in metaphysics, Shariati's social and political thought were "firmly rooted in the real world of men" [*sic*].<sup>152</sup>

While Akhavi describes Shariati as one of the prominent "social theorists of the [1979] Iranian revolution," he does not see a link between the post-revolution institutionalization of Islamism and Shariati's intellectual legacy. On the contrary, Akhavi believes that the inclusion of some democratic provisions in the first post-revolution constitution may have been due in part to the influence of the humanist Islamic discourses of Muslim reformers such as Shariati and Taliqna'i.<sup>153</sup> Despite the incorporation of some democratic measures, Akhavi argues, the constitution of the new regime ultimately placed sovereignty in God and God's replacements, including the prophet, imams, and the *faqih*. In Akhavi's view, the anti-democratic structures of the Islamic Republic stand in contradiction with Shariati's firm belief in the ability of the common people to rule over their own affairs. He notes that the existence of radical philosophical and political differences between the Islamic discourses of Shariati and Khomeini led to "Shariati's virtual 'excommunication' by the [post-revolution] regime."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Akhavi, "Islam, Politics and Society," 412.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 428.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 428. What Akhavi is referring to is the fact that Shariati was seen by the Islamist regime as the advocate of an anti-clerical interpretation of Islam, and subsequently within a brief period after the revolution many of Shariati's books were banned and his followers were often faced with imprisonment and other restrictions.

While Akhavi's analysis highlights the humanist, democratic, and egalitarian qualities of Shariati's religiously oriented political philosophy, a number of other academic commentators have been considerably more skeptical in their readings of the philosophical foundations of Shariati's revolutionary Islamic discourse. Contrary to Akhavi's reading, these critical accounts often draw a direct link between Shariati's thought and the ascendancy of an anti-democratic Islamist discourse and political repression in post-revolutionary Iran.<sup>155</sup> In these accounts, Shariati's revolutionary Islam is seen as being part of a broader mid-twentieth century Islamic discourse of authenticity that opposed the philosophical foundations of Enlightenment modernity, rejected the modern concepts of individual reason and subjectivity, and sought to develop a total Islamic alternative to the modern visions of intellectual, cultural, and sociopolitical development. Among others, in a number of his writings, Iranian sociologist Ali Mirsepassi has described Shariati's discourse as being based on a counter-Enlightenment political philosophy. In "Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity" (2006), Mirsepassi argues that Shariati's attempt to develop a nativized vision of modernity in the Iranian context "foundered on a dangerous preoccupation with blinding metaphysical abstractions that, though high sounding and seductive in their language, conceal a narrow and dangerously totalizing understanding."<sup>156</sup> According to Mirsepassi, within a Heideggerian framework of analysis Shariati's Islamic discourse sought to revive an ontological bond between modern Iranians and their community "as a recovery of the ideal

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<sup>155</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, "Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006), 416.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 431.

and unified Islamic society."<sup>157</sup> In his view, Shariati's authenticist discourse in pre-revolution Iran constituted an attack on the modern ideas of "democracy," "pluralism," and "secularism," from the vantage point of an ahistorical vision of Islamic authenticity.<sup>158</sup>

In his 2011 book entitled *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair*, Mirsepassi once again makes the case that Shariati's approach to modernity was informed primarily by Heideggerian views about the modern loss of an existential bond between the individual and the community.<sup>159</sup> According to Mirsepassi, like Heidegger, Shariati sought to bring this ontological bond back into the everyday life of a modern society by claiming to recover an ideal and unified authentic past.<sup>160</sup> In his view, the reference to God in Shariati's thought served the extremely important function of "granting singular and ultimate authority" to collective identity and mass movement.<sup>161</sup> Mirsepassi further argues that Shariati's collectivist orientation was manifested in his top-down and "statist" approach to social and political change. Under the influence of a Heideggerian vision of modernity, he argues, Shariati saw the state as the mechanism through which "to elevate the population."<sup>162</sup> For Mirsepassi, Shariati's discourse of guided democracy and his emphasis on the revolutionary

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 428.

<sup>158</sup> Mirsepassi, "Religious Intellectuals," 416-428.

<sup>159</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 126.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 25.

role of the committed Muslim intellectuals in the processes of social and political change are reflective of just such a collectivist vision.<sup>163</sup>

Arguably, one of the most sophisticated and detailed assessments of Shariati's social and political philosophy has been advanced by another Iranian sociologist, Farzin Vahdat. In a number of his works, Vahdat examines Shariati's encounter with the philosophical foundations of Enlightenment modernity with a focus on modern subjectivity.<sup>164</sup> He argues that Shariati's philosophical thought developed a religiously mediated account of subjectivity that recognized a limited measure of human will and agency. In pre-revolution Iranian society, he contends, Shariati's particular account of "mediated subjectivity" introduced many religiously-oriented Iranians to modern ideas and facilitated their participation in a mass revolutionary movement that led to the 1979 revolution. Nevertheless, Vahdat argues that by defining human autonomy as an attribute of divine sovereignty, Shariati's Islamic discourse only allowed for a partial or incomplete recognition of human subjectivity.

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<sup>163</sup> In analyzing Shariati's political philosophy in his essay as well as in his book, Mirsepassi rarely makes direct reference to Shariati's text, and despite his claims about the strong influence of Heidegger on Shariati's thought Mirsepassi fails to demonstrate a clear link between the ideas of the two thinkers.

<sup>164</sup> See: Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002); Farzin Vahdat, "Religious Modernity in Iran: Dilemmas of Islamic Democracy in the Discourse of Mohammad Khatami," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 3 (2005): 650-664; Farzin Vahdat, "Critical Theory and the Islamic Encounter with Modernity," in *Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity*, ed. Michael Thompson (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003): 123-139; Farzin Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations of Islamic Revolutionary Discourse in Iran: Vacillations on Human Subjectivity," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 14 (1999): 49-73; Farzin Vahdat, "shariati: bohran-e haviat-e irani va zehn-bonyaadi" (Shariati: The Crisis of the Iranian Identity and Subjectivity"), trans. Simin Fasihi, in *khodkavi-e melli dar asr-e jahani shodan (National Self-Examination in the Age of Globalization)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Ghasidehsara, 1381/2002): 222-237.

Vahdat's views about Shariati's political philosophy find common ground with those of Mirsepassi in a number of ways. Like Mirsepassi, Vahdat sees a deep contradiction between Shariati's religious ontology and the philosophical foundations of the modern rights-bearing individual. Also like Mirsepassi, Vahdat defines modernity primarily in reference to the European Enlightenment and its intellectual legacy. However, whereas Mirsepassi attributes Shariati's "counter-Enlightenment" position to the influence of Heideggerian thought, Vahdat sees it mainly as a function of Shariati's monotheistic ontology. Drawing heavily on the Hegelian/Habermasian conception of a modern epistemic break between secular and religious reason, Vahdat defines modernity as the rise of the rational, autonomous, and empowered human subject and a break from the metaphysics and the God of revelation and transcendence. By remaining within a religious ontology, Vahdat believes, Shariati's thought ultimately distorts and rejects the autonomous and rights-bearing subject of Enlightenment modernity.<sup>165</sup>

In the following section, I discuss in more detail Vahdat's critique of Shariati's Islamic discourse and its philosophical foundations. Since Vahdat's analysis relies on a particular Habermasian conception of the religion-modernity nexus, the chapter then briefly introduces some of the key components of Jürgen Habermas's discourse of modernity as well as some of its major critiques. I argue that the Habermasian discourse of modern reason, on the basis of which Vahdat examines Shariati's encounter with philosophical modernity, is particularly

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<sup>165</sup> As the first chapter pointed out, Vahdat's overall assessment of Shariati's Islamic discourse and his intellectual legacy is less sceptical than Mirsepassi's. He considers the discourse of mediated subjectivity as a transitory discourse which can potentially contribute to the transition of Iranian society to modernity. The full transition, however, requires the negotiation and gradual consolidation of absolute/universal subjectivity.

inadequate for analyzing the multifaceted modes and processes of the negotiation of indigenous visions of modernity in contemporary Muslim societies. By turning its focus on Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought by his contemporary intellectual followers in post-revolutionary Iran, the final section offers an alternative reading of Shariati's religious ontology and its sociopolitical implications for his project of indigenous modernity. A case is made that even though Shariati's religiously mediated account of subjectivity is presented as an alternative to the subjectivity of Enlightenment modernity, in the particular context of Iranian society it has contributed to the negotiation of a contextually grounded discourse of the autonomous modern subject and the rights-bearing individual.

### **Modern Subjectivity and the Mediated Subject**

Vahdat defines modernity in terms of subjectivity and universality, which he regards to be the twin philosophical pillars of Enlightenment thought. The former is defined as "the property characterizing the autonomous, self-willing, self-defining, and self-conscious individual agent," and the latter as "the mutual recognition among the plurality of subjects of each other's subjectivity."<sup>166</sup> In Vahdat's view, there is a close association between the philosophical pillars of modernity and the ideas of popular sovereignty, democracy, individual and

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<sup>166</sup> Farzin Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations of Islamic Revolutionary Discourse in Iran: Vacillations on Human Subjectivity," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 14 (1999), 51.

citizenship rights and freedoms, and equality.<sup>167</sup> According to him, the quest for subjectivity and universality has shaped the modern "impulse ... against objectification and domination," in at least two important ways. In the cultural sphere it has transformed "primary relations of domination and subordination, prototypically, the relationship between the transcendental God of monotheism and human worshippers," and in the political sphere it has given birth to the rights-bearing citizen and the modern civil society.<sup>168</sup>

In Vahdat's view, among the major philosophers of Enlightenment modernity, Hegel's approach to modern subjectivity and religion contains particularly relevant insights for contemporary Muslim societies. For Hegel, he argues, the modern individual is at once embedded in his/her local cultural context and able to rise above it. To achieve the latter, however, requires treating one's society and culture as objects of conscious and critical reflection. Through the force of critical self-reflection both individuals and nations can rise above the prevailing social and cultural traditions, norms, beliefs, and customs, "even though such phenomena [are] ultimately rooted in the *Geist*."<sup>169</sup> As a pre-modern phenomenon with fixed concepts and beliefs, religion is ultimately a force against self-conscious and critical reflection, which arrests the development of genuine subjectivity. Thus, Vahdat believes, Hegel's lesson for contemporary Muslim societies may be that the full realization of self-consciousness and the genuine exercise of human agency and freedom would not be possible without a complete

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<sup>167</sup> Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 23.



break with religious ontology and epistemology.<sup>170</sup> Vahdat further argues that today the Hegelian conception of the religion-modernity nexus is advocated chiefly by the philosophical discourse of Jürgen Habermas, and Vahdat's analysis of the responses to modernity by Shariati and a number of other nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim thinkers relies heavily on Hegelian/Habermasian epistemic distinction between religious and non-religious reason.

According to Vahdat, the encounter with Enlightenment modernity in Muslim societies occurred mainly against the background of opposition to Western colonialism and imperialism. In his view, in the course of this opposition a number of radical Muslim thinkers including Jamal al-Din Afghani, Ruhollah Khomeini, Morteza Motahari, and Ali Shariati advanced a revolutionary "Islamic discourse" that served two main objectives: first, to counter the Western discourse of modernity, and second, to instill a sense of collective agency in the Muslim masses in order to mobilize them against Western domination. Vahdat believes that while the political and philosophical discourses of these Muslim thinkers often gave recognition to some measure of human autonomy and subjectivity, they nevertheless placed the individual human in subordination to collective and abstract metaphysical notions. Thus, he argues, the type of subjectivity that the Islamic discourse acknowledged was mediated, conditional, incomplete, and distorted.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 224.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 55. Also see: Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations," 59.

By "mediated subjectivity" Vahdat refers to a religiously negotiated conception of human subjectivity, which is advanced through the partial human appropriation of the traditional attributes of the God of monotheism.<sup>172</sup> Hence, it is argued, a particular account of human subjectivity is acknowledged in contemporary Islamic thought and captured in the Islamic notion of the human vicegerency of God on earth (*khilafate-ilahiah*). According to Vahdat, however, defining human subjectivity as an attribute of divine sovereignty has resulted in a "core conflict" and a "constant, schizophrenic vacillation" between human and God and between the individual and the collective in Islamic discourse. In his view, the ascendancy of the Islamic discourse in pre-revolution Iran effectively distorted the modern conceptions of individual subjectivity, autonomy, and sovereignty, and legitimized restrictions on modern democratic rights and freedoms in the post-revolutionary context.<sup>173</sup>

Shariati is described by Vahdat as one of the most influential advocates of the "Islamic discourse" in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s, along with Ruhollah Khomeini and Morteza Motahari.<sup>174</sup> Shariati is also seen as an archetypal Muslim ideologue who developed an indigenous account of collective subjectivity on the basis of partial human appropriation of the traditional attributes of an absolute and all-powerful deity. In Vahdat's view, Shariati believed that European economic imperialism in Muslim and other non-European societies contained a project of "cultural imperialism," which alienated these societies from their local and

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<sup>172</sup> Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations," 53.

<sup>173</sup> Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 134.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-132.

traditional cultural roots and brought in their stead modern patterns of materialism and consumerism.<sup>175</sup> According to Vahdat, Shariati's solution to this perceived crisis of self-alienation was a return to "the once unified, but now lost" collective and authentic Iranian-Islamic self.<sup>176</sup> He argues that while the authentic self to which Shariati called was grounded in Iran's religious and cultural traditions, it nevertheless represented "a radical reinterpretation" of both religion and culture.<sup>177</sup>

Shariati, Vahdat argues, re-appropriated the traditional religious category of monotheism (*tawhid*) and used it as "a universal category" based on "consciousness," "will," and "human moral autonomy."<sup>178</sup> Shariati's ontology, he believes, advanced an account of subjectivity that saw human existence as a journey toward transcendence that elevated humans from the level of unconscious matter to the level of the conscious and sovereign God of monotheism. Vahdat argues that although Shariati's mediated subjectivity appealed to self-consciousness, his understanding of the term was radically different from "Hegelian self-consciousness inherent in the subject's freedom."<sup>179</sup> Far from representing a category of critical and reasoned self-reflection, Shariati's notion of consciousness is argued to have entailed the annihilation of the self in divine sovereignty and the partial appropriation of the latter by a human collectivity.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 137.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

Vahdat believes that Shariati was at once excited about the modern possibility of a God-like human subject, and alarmed by the crisis of modern subjectivity manifested in philosophical nihilism and a variety of other forms. He argues that Shariati's encounter with modernity is best described as "bewilderment" (*heyrat*), a term that Shariati himself used frequently to refer to the spiritual-existential angst of the twentieth century individual. According to Vahdat, Shariati saw the subject of modernity as the lonely wolf, "who, after challenging the Being and nature, was now horrified by the solitude of subjectivity."<sup>181</sup> Shariati, it is argued, feared that his "ontological journey" toward subjectivity may ultimately lead him to the same conclusions as those of Western modernity, namely, diremption from nature and the whole of existence.<sup>182</sup> Vahdat maintains that Shariati found the solution to his modern bewilderment "in submission to the Being, in annihilation of the self in God, and in finding a 'new' self, who, in cooperation with God and Love, would create the universe anew in a utopia of mediated subjectivity."<sup>183</sup>

According to Vahdat, just as Shariati's metaphysical ontology simultaneously accepted and negated human subjectivity, his political philosophy too contained both elements that endorsed, as well as those that opposed, "the notions of popular sovereignty and citizenship rights."<sup>184</sup> For Vahdat, this conflicting position was rooted in a fundamental contradiction in Shariati's Islamic discourse. On the one hand, Shariati's anti-imperialist ideology sought to

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<sup>181</sup> Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 144.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations," 61.

mobilize the Muslim masses against Western material and cultural domination by giving recognition to a particular form of agency modeled after divine sovereignty and embodied in a human collectivity. On the other hand, however, suspicious and fearful of the moral and sociopolitical consequences of modern subjectivity, Shariati opposed the individual subject at the center of Enlightenment modernity. Thus, Vahdat argues that while Shariati's discourse acknowledged a measure of human autonomy and subjectivity, in reality this was only an endorsement of "*collective*, not individual agency."<sup>185</sup>

Vahdat acknowledges that in some of his writings Shariati made explicit references to the pivotal role of the "individual" agent.<sup>186</sup> According to him, Shariati was well aware that "responsibility was meaningless without the individual as the subject" and even argued that the Quran had given recognition to "the individual as the very foundation of the notion of responsibility." At the same time, Vahdat holds that Shariati's approval of "philosophical individualism" did not translate into support for "moral-practical individualism."<sup>187</sup> For him, Shariati's contention that nature, history, society, and self/ego constituted four "prisons" that limited genuine human subjectivity and agency revealed a deep suspicion toward the individual subject and a "profound contempt for the human body."<sup>188</sup> Vahdat believes that Shariati's distrust of the individual subject was also manifested in his critical position towards "liberal democracy" and "individual

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<sup>185</sup> Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 146 (emphasis in original).

<sup>186</sup> Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations," 60.

<sup>187</sup> Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 148.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

and civil freedoms."<sup>189</sup> He argues that Shariati's attempt to locate subjectivity in a collective category closely paralleled Marxist views on the relationship between individual and society.<sup>190</sup>

To expose what he sees as the anti-democratic crux of Shariati's political philosophy, Vahdat focuses on the thesis of committed/guided democracy (*demokrasy-e mota'ahed*), which he considers to be Shariati's major work in social and political theory. Examining the thesis through the lens of mediated subjectivity, Vahdat argues that for Shariati achieving a measure of collective agency and social change required leadership and the guidance of society from above.<sup>191</sup> In his view, Shariati rejected democratic governance models and instead believed that "it was the responsibility of government to transform people's moral, mental, and social conditions from what they 'were' to what they 'ought' to be."<sup>192</sup> According to Vahdat, Shariati saw Iranian citizens as "children" or "sheep" in need of guidance and leadership. The theory of guided democracy, he argues, "negated the possibility of popular sovereignty, at least for a few generations to come, even though [Shariati] did not totally dismiss the possibility of a democratic system."<sup>193</sup>

Vahdat's analysis about Shariati's ontological views and his positions toward democracy and individual rights and freedoms seem to present only a selective reading of Shariati's text and an incomplete depiction of his overall

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<sup>189</sup> *God and Juggernaut*, 148.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 151. Also see: Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations," 61.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

intellectual project. In the previous two chapters, Shariati's views about the notions of human agency and autonomy, and his endorsement of modernity as a universal condition that enhances the free exercise of individual will were discussed in some detail. Furthermore, as Chapter Three pointed out, while Shariati was more concerned with the general conditions for the realization of individual freedom than with any specific rights and freedoms, in some of his writings he explicitly defended democratic freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of political association. Similarly, Vahdat's belief that the thesis of guided democracy represents the core of Shariati's political thought faces a serious challenge once Shariati's own position, namely that the theory of guided democracy only applied to tribal societies and not to twentieth century Iran, is taken into account.<sup>194</sup> Finally, while Vahdat draws parallels between Shariati's Islamic discourse and Marxist accounts of collective subjectivity, he wholly ignores Shariati's criticism of the suppression of individuality and individual rights in the former Eastern bloc countries. Contrary to Vahdat's account, in his critique of really existing socialism, Shariati advanced not only a philosophical but also a moral-practical defense of individual freedoms. He even went so far as to argue that despite the violence of capitalism and imperialism, the protection of basic individual rights and liberties made the capitalist West a more desirable

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<sup>194</sup> Ali Shariati, *Iqbal and Us: Collected Works 5 (ma va iqbal: majmooeh asaar 5)*, (Aachen, Germany: Hosseinieh Ershad, 1978), 48. It was also mentioned in previous chapters that Shariati changed his position on the role of intellectuals in his later works including *Iqbal and Us*, and *Return*.

place to live for dissident intellectuals and political activists from capitalist and socialist countries alike.<sup>195</sup>

Later in this chapter, I shall focus on the responses to Vahdat by neo-Shariatis and Shariati's other contemporary followers. In the next section, however, I will briefly discuss some of the main features of the Habermasian view of the religion-modernity nexus, as well as some of the major critiques of his theory. While Vahdat's Hegelian/Habermasian analytical framework does not seem to leave much room for the presence and the potentially progressive role of religion in modern public life, the next section will show that Habermas's own recent work has given recognition to public religion and its potentially progressive capacities in the modern world. Moreover, the following discussion will point to some of the limitations of the Habermasian discourse of modernity and his epistemic distinction between religious and secular reason. It argues that contrary to Vahdat's analysis and its Habermasian normative assumptions, the rejection of the Enlightenment discourse of human subjectivity on the basis of a religious/spiritual ontology does not necessarily amount to rejecting the modern notions of individual autonomy, freedom, and rights.

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<sup>195</sup> Shariati writes: "How sad that in the name of socialism, and with inhumane violence, [the really existing socialism] denies the freedom of intellect, the freedom to worship, and the freedoms to choose, act, and innovate. And how sad that these barbaric and fascistic ways are justified using lofty and sophisticated philosophical and sociological arguments. There is no bigger catastrophe than the fact that Socialism is robbing twentieth century humanity of the gains that were made under Western capitalism, and that today leading anti-colonial and even socialist intellectuals from the Third World are forced to seek refuge in Capitalist countries." See: Ali Shariati, M.A. 2, 166, quoted in Reza Alijani, *Rend-e kham: Shariati-shenasi jeld-e yekom: zamaneh, zendegi, va arman-ha (The Pure Nonconformist: Shariatiology Volume One: Era, Life, and Ideals)* (Tehran: Ghalam 1387), 226.



## Beyond Enlightenment Modernity: Critiquing Habermas and the Discourse of Secular Reason

For German philosopher Jürgen Habermas religion properly belongs to a pre-modern age of the evolution of human societies when mythological-metaphysical views of the world prevailed.<sup>196</sup> In "The Political: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology" (2011), Habermas argues that in traditional societies such as Medieval Europe political power was legitimized primarily by religion, whose legitimizing power was "rooted, *independently of politics*, in notions of salvation and calamity (*Heil and Unheil*) and in corresponding practices of coping with redemptive and menacing forces."<sup>197</sup> By challenging the totalizing reign of religion, modernity demythologized and rationalized "the symbolic representation and collective self-understanding" of Europeans.<sup>198</sup> The rise of modern modes of production and bureaucratic administration, and the yearning for religious tolerance and pluralism after Europe's religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contributed to the "dissolution of the amalgamation of religion and politics" and the secularization of the political sphere. The late eighteenth century constitutional revolutions marked a major "break with the traditional pattern of legitimation"

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<sup>196</sup> See: Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); Jürgen Habermas, *Observations of "The Spiritual Situation of the Age,"* trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere." *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1-25; Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

<sup>197</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "The Political: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 17 (emphasis in original).

<sup>198</sup> Habermas, "The Political: The Rational Meaning," 18.

and further consolidated "the secularization of state authority" in the modern West.<sup>199</sup>

However, as Habermas tells us, the "secularization of the state" has not always meant the concurrent and evenhanded "secularization of society." According to him, the continued presence of religion in public life poses a unique challenge to modern secular democracies.<sup>200</sup> While secularism requires restricting the public influence of religion, political liberalism entails guaranteeing the equal right of all religious and non-religious citizens to influence democratic outcomes. For Habermas, the appropriate response to this condition is not to privatize religion entirely as laicism calls for, but instead to make participation in the collective decision making process contingent upon the use of "public reason" by all, including religious citizens.<sup>201</sup> Habermas borrows the concept of public reason from twentieth century American political philosopher John Rawls who saw a similar tension between the use of religious speech or religious reason in the public sphere and the liberal-democratic requirements of free speech and religious freedom. In a 1997 essay entitled, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," Rawls proposed that religious doctrines and worldviews "may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are

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<sup>199</sup> Habermas, "'The Political': The Rational Meaning," 21.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 24.

presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support."<sup>202</sup>

According to Habermas, however, the Rawlsian proviso that any religious utterance in the public sphere must prove to be translatable into the language of "proper political discourse" faces two important objections. The first objection is that "many citizens *cannot* or are not willing to make the required separation between contributions expressed in religious terms and those expressed in secular language when they take political stances." The second objection is that under a "liberal constitution," which gives recognition to religious freedoms and forms of life, the proviso may impose an "asymmetrical burden" on religious citizens.<sup>203</sup> Seeking to retain Rawls's overall scheme while also addressing these objections, Habermas introduces a modified account of the translation proviso that aims to properly define the scope of the restrictions that may be legitimately imposed on public religious discourse.

For Habermas, though religious citizens are free "to use religious language in the public sphere," they should also accept "that the potential truth contents of religious utterances must be translated into a generally accessible language before they can find their way onto the agenda of parliaments, courts, or administrative bodies and influence their decision." He presents the notion of an "institutional filter" that channels potentially relevant religious contributions in the public sphere through to the "formal deliberation of political bodies" by translating them

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<sup>202</sup> John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (Summer 1997), 783, quoted in Habermas, "The Political: The Rational Meaning," 25.

<sup>203</sup> Habermas, "The Political: The Rational Meaning," 25.

into the "universally accessible language" of public reason.<sup>204</sup> Habermas believes that his modified translation proviso addresses the objections leveled against Rawls by ensuring not only that religious citizens can freely use religious discourse in the public sphere, but also that their contributions are not falling on deaf ears and being rejected or ignored by non-religious citizens. Thus, he argues that just as religious citizens must adhere to the translation proviso in the public sphere, secular citizens too "are obliged not to publicly dismiss religious contributions to political opinion and will formation as mere noise, or even nonsense, from the start."<sup>205</sup> Moreover, Habermas's translation scheme entails the recognition that "vibrant world religions may be bearers of 'truth contents,' in the sense of suppressed or untapped moral intuition."<sup>206</sup>

Arguably, by giving recognition to the potentially progressive moral and inspirational capacities of religion in the public sphere, Habermas has acknowledged a minimal account of public religion in his more recent work.<sup>207</sup> Habermas's account of the potential contributions of public religious discourse in the modern processes of social and political change in these works also appears to advance a more optimistic view about the role and place of religion in the modern world than the one advanced by Vahdat. Nevertheless, Habermas's critics have challenged his view about an epistemic divide between secular and religious thought. For some of these critics, Habermas's epistemic sacred-secular binary is rooted in a Eurocentric framework in which the modern European subject is

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<sup>204</sup> Habermas, "The Political: The Rational Meaning," 25-26.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>207</sup> See: Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1-25.

conceived of as the self of modernity, and the non-European as its subordinate other. In his seminal work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas himself describes modernity as a European development and as inseparable from "Occidental rationalism."<sup>208</sup> For one critic, this conception of modernity rests on a "colonial geo-cultural imaginary" in which the Occident represents rationality and philosophy while the Orient represents mythology and spirituality.<sup>209</sup> Robbie Shilliam argues that within a global context of the expansion of European colonialism, a range of modern thinkers — from Kant to Habermas — have advanced a particular discourse of modernity that has "privileged the European being as the teleological truth of human existence" and forwarded "a universal standard of civilization modeled upon an idealized western Europe."<sup>210</sup>

Challenging the monolithic and dichotomistic construction of sacred and secular in Habermas's discourse of modernity, critics have drawn attention to the diverse expressions of the religious matter in the modern world. Judith Butler, for example, points out that the modern public sphere in the West has itself emerged out of certain religious traditions that "help to establish a set of criteria that delimit the public from the private."<sup>211</sup> She argues that in modern societies we are faced not with a singular category of "religion," but rather with "a variety of

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<sup>208</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, *Reason and Rationalization of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 7.

<sup>209</sup> Robbie Shilliam, "The Perilous but Unavoidable Terrain of the Non-West," in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (New York: Routledge, 2011), 13.

<sup>210</sup> Robbie Shilliam, "Non-Western Thought and International Relations," in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>211</sup> Judith Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 71.

religious positions on public life and a variety of ways of conceiving of public life within religious terms."<sup>212</sup> In her analysis of the complex nature of the negotiation of three categories, namely "Jewishness," "Judaism," and "Zionism," Butler shows how contemporary Jewish thought has given birth to both "identitarian" and "anti-identitarian" social and political projects.<sup>213</sup>

Charles Taylor too critiques Habermas's treatment of religion as a special case and a unique challenge in modern secular democracies. According to Taylor, the main point of contention in discussions on secularism should not be about "the relation of the state and religion," but rather about the appropriate democratic responses to diversity and difference within the modern public sphere.<sup>214</sup> The principle of state neutrality, he claims, aims precisely to avoid advantaging or disadvantaging any basic position, religious or non-religious, in the collective decision-making process.<sup>215</sup> To the secular-democratic state, Taylor argues, it should not make a difference what "deeper reasons" or what ontological and epistemological arguments different groups of citizens (religious or secular) offer in order to gain access to and/or to negotiate and advance the basic tenets of democratic governance. Challenging Habermas's view that religious discourse is comprehensible only to those who have already accepted its foundational dogma, Taylor suggests that there is no ground for thinking, for instance, that Martin

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<sup>212</sup> Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism," 70.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>214</sup> Charles Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 36.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 37.

Luther King's Christian discourse of liberation and social justice is any less publicly and generally accessible than a secular discourse of rights

According to Taylor, Habermas's epistemological sacred/secular distinction is rooted in a "myth" of Enlightenment that sees modernity as the "stepping out of a realm in which Revelation ... counted as a source of insight about human affairs into a realm in which these are now understood in purely this-worldly or human terms." Taylor regards such a view to be historically untenable, and his own account of modernity draws attention to the multiple and multifaceted sources of the modern Western self and the sustained influence of religious traditions in the formation of the public sphere. According to Taylor, while the rise of modernity in Europe entailed the recognition of independent human reason, the claim that such a development constituted a total epistemic shift "from Revelation to reason alone" is in question.<sup>216</sup>

Critics of Habermas have also drawn attention to some of the ways in which contemporary religious discourses such as black liberation theology have been used to challenge the dominating tendencies of Western modernity.<sup>217</sup> Among the leading contemporary representatives of this discourse, Cornel West has acknowledged both the emancipatory and the oppressive manifestations of religion in the modern world by distinguishing between "prophetic" religion and "dominant" religiosity. Whereas the former is characterized by "an empathetic

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<sup>216</sup> Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition," 52-3. Also see: Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*: The CBC Massey Lectures 1991 (Concord: Anansi Press, 1991); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?*, ed. James L. Heft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>217</sup> Shilliam, "The Perilous but Unavoidable Terrain of the Non-West," 13.

and imaginative power that confronts hegemonic power," the latter represents a religion that is "well-adjusted to greed and fear and bigotry" and is indifferent toward the condition of poor and working classes. West believes in the power of prophetic religion to initiate "utopian interruptions" against oppression and hegemony.<sup>218</sup> Following Émile Durkheim's analysis in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), West regards "worship and faith" as an "eternal" character of human societies. In his view, whereas in capitalist modernity the worship of God has been replaced with the worship of "the market or its accompaniments and accoutrements," prophetic religion can interrupt this new form of "idolatry" and give the modern subject the courage to love the other and to "sacrifice for justice."<sup>219</sup>

West challenges Habermas's epistemic sacred-secular binary and criticizes tendencies within political liberalism to police the public sphere by appealing to the concept of secular reason. For West, by marginalizing the deeply religious cultures of "the wretched of the earth," dogmatic secularism depletes the public sphere of potentially emancipatory discourses.<sup>220</sup> He argues that what is urgently needed in contemporary liberal-democracies is not further "secularization", but rather the "democratization of the state" and attention to the condition of the

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<sup>218</sup> Cornel West, "Prophetic Religion and the Future of Capitalist Civilization," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 99.

<sup>219</sup> Cornel West, "Dialogue: Judith Butler and Cornel West," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 105-6.

<sup>220</sup> Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, "Introduction: The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 11. Also see: Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Maidson: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 233.



poor.<sup>221</sup> Noting that Weberian predictions about the decline of "God-talk" were not realized in the modern world, West argues that deepening democracy in contemporary societies is contingent on our "ability to be multicontextual in the various frameworks and reason-giving activities in public spaces."<sup>222</sup> Practicing genuine public multitextuality for him, requires, among other things, that secular thinkers become more "religiously musical," and religious thinkers more "secularly musical."<sup>223</sup>

Also critiquing Habermas's discourse of secular reason, Fred Dallmayr argues that the German philosopher's insistence on the sacred-secular binary marks a departure from the Germanic tradition of critical theory. The latter, he argues, emerged as an attempt to curb the hegemonic tendency of modern reason and to reconcile subjectivity with non-domination. Under the impact of the rise of fascism and anti-Semitism, Dallmayr notes that a range of critical theorists (including Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno) began to draw attention to "the darkly sinister undertow of Western modernity," and to warn against the "ongoing shrinkage of critical reason and self-reflection into a mere instrument of calculation and managerial control."<sup>224</sup> According to Dallmayr, in their critical analysis of late capitalist modernity, these thinkers often maintained a "sympathetic" position toward emancipatory religious thought and saw religion as a major source of inspiration in the struggle against relations of domination and exploitation. In fact, he argues, in their effort to

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<sup>221</sup> West, "Dialogue," 107.

<sup>222</sup> West, "Prophetic Religion," 93.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "The Underside of Modernity: Adorno, Heidegger, and Dussel," *Constellations* 11, no.1 (March 2004), 103.

reconcile the subject of modernity with its others, some German critical theorists turned to the emancipatory and utopian capacities of religious ontologies, including the Jewish tradition of "utopian messianism," which they saw as a radical ontological turn toward the other.<sup>225</sup>

The critical deconstruction of Habermas's discourse of modernity by critics such as Butler, Taylor, West, and Dallmayr shows the limitations of his epistemic sacred-secular binary for understanding the role of religion in modern social and political developments. Contrary to Vahdat's claim, Habermas's analysis does not seem to offer an alternative to traditional Western analysis about the modernity-religion nexus. In fact, as his critics have pointed out, Habermas's discourse of modern reason reproduces the very same Weberian dichotomy between religion and modernity that underlay the hegemonic twentieth century metanarratives of modernization and secularization. In the context of contemporary Muslim societies, Habermas's conceptualization of the modern public sphere as the realm of secular reason does not seem to provide a particularly adequate framework for understanding the complexities and the nuances of the relationship between religion and the modern processes of sociopolitical development.

As noted in Chapters One, Two, and Three, since the nineteenth century encounter with colonial modernity, there has been a sustained effort by Muslim thinkers to develop contextually negotiated accounts of modernity by drawing on

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<sup>225</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Review of Jurgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* no. 2 (2003), <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23259/?id=1179> (accessed 8 June 2012).

the social and inspirational capacities of religion. While a wide range of prominent Muslim modernizers and reformers including Iqbal, Shariati, Abu Zayd, Arkun, Gülen, and Soroush have been critical of the post-Enlightenment juxtaposition of modernity against religion, their humanist accounts of Islamic thought have, nevertheless, contributed to the development of indigenous discourses of subjectivity, democracy, and human rights. To the extent that religion remains a major force in social and political life in contemporary Muslim societies, it seems that any serious attempt toward understanding the condition of modernity must take into account the plural manifestation of religious matter. In the following section I focus on Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought by his contemporary intellectual followers in order to present an alternative reading of what Vahdat terms Shariati's mediated subjectivity. I argue that contrary to Vahdat's reading, in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran, Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought have contributed to the negotiation of an indigenous discourse of subjectivity and the recognition of the rights-bearing citizen.

### **Shariati and the Islamic Discourse Revisited**

As Chapter Three argued, in the context of mid-twentieth century Iranian society, Shariati was among the pioneering intellectuals to contribute to the critical deconstruction of the sacred/secular binary which informed the dominant paradigms of modernism and secularism. It was also argued that despite their

opposition to the fusion of religious and political power in post-revolutionary Iran, Shariati's contemporary intellectual followers have made a sustained effort to expand on his radical re-thinking of the religion-modernity nexus in modern post-Enlightenment thought. In this regard, the discourses of Shariati and neo-Shariatis find common ground with the discourses of Butler, Taylor, West, Dallmayr, and a range of other critics of the Hegelian/Habermasian ontological and epistemological juxtaposition of sacred and secular. Like these critics, Shariati and neo-Shariatis reject the conception of modernity as a unilinear trajectory of the rationalization and secularization of the public sphere and a total break from religion. They challenge the monolithic construction of the categories of religion, religious reason, and religious discourse by drawing attention to the plural manifestations of the religious matter in modern societies, and the role of religion as a perpetual source of individual and collective identity. Pointing to the global phenomenon of the "return of religion" at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium, one neo-Shariati figure, for instance, argues that "it is modernity that in the course of its expansion has provided the conditions for the reproduction of the religious matter."<sup>226</sup> Moreover, like some of the radical critics of the discourse of Enlightenment rationality, in their critique of the prevailing (traditional and modern) relations of domination Shariati and neo-Shariatis appeal to the inspirational capacities of religion for negotiating a radical turn toward giving recognition to the inherent dignity of the other.

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<sup>226</sup> Sara Shariati, "Dar bareh shariat-e emkan-e moderniteh dini," ("On the Conditions for the Possibility of Religious Modernity"), in *Dar hashiyeh matn (On the Margins of the Text)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Shahr-e Aftab, 1379/2000), 143.

For Shariati, by rejecting religion as a source of insight in the modern world and turning to philosophical rationalism and scientific positivism, European Enlightenment thought effectively abandoned the ontological commitment to the other. In making this argument, Shariati is influenced primarily by leading twentieth century Muslim philosopher Muhammad Iqbal, and his epistemological distinction between scientific-philosophical and religious-spiritual worldviews. According to Shariati, while the former worldview calls for a total separation between pure reason and its others (feeling, intuition, inspiration, and revelation), the latter seeks to reconcile the two. Enlightenment modernity's scientific-philosophical worldview, he argues, defines knowledge exclusively in terms of the relationship between a "rational human subject" and an "objective reality," thus, de-linking the individual from community, nature, and existence.<sup>227</sup> By deconstructing the modern juxtaposition of the individual human agent versus an outside reality, a spiritual interpretation of being can reunite the modern individual with its others and reconcile the subject of modernity with a multilayered reality.<sup>228</sup>

Despite his critique of the sacred/secular binary, Shariati nevertheless points to the recognition of human reason and autonomy as one of the progressive legacies of Enlightenment modernity, and like Hegel he sees a direct link between self-consciousness and the rise of the modern subject. Indeed, while Vahdat contends that Shariati's conception of self-consciousness is radically different

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<sup>227</sup> Ali Shariati, "Introduction," in *Koliaat-e Iqbal Lahori (The Poetry Collection of Iqbal Lahori)* (Tehran: Elham, 1384/2005), 14.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

from Hegel's, the two notions seem to share a fundamental commitment to the critical re-assessment of the sources of the self. For Shariati, "consciousness," or "self-consciousness," is achieved through a critical engagement with the world and by gaining an awareness of the relationship between the self and the other. Like the Hegelian concept, Shariati's notion of self-consciousness begins with what he himself calls a "Cartesian doubt" and a radical revolt against the traditional self.<sup>229</sup> As Reza Alijani points out, for Shariati, the first move toward self-consciousness is to step out of one's immediate social and cultural context and to critically engage with prevailing traditions. Alijani cites Shariati's discussions in the twenty-third volume of his collected works, entitled *Worldview and Ideology (jahanbini va ideology)*, where he argues that arriving at self-consciousness necessitates subjecting "all of our thoughts, beliefs, and norms, and all of our religious, traditional, philosophical, tribal, ethnic, class, or ideological belongings ... to a relentless critique and questioning all of their primary claims."<sup>230</sup> As Alijani notes, Shariati even cites English empiricist philosopher, Francis Bacon (1561-1626), to argue that genuine self-consciousness requires breaking down all of the "idols of the mind."<sup>231</sup>

At the same time, Shariati believes that advancing a radical critique of the traditional self would be impossible without acknowledging the embeddedness of our individual and collective selves. If moving toward self-consciousness begins with a Cartesian doubt, it must inevitably continue with a radical re-definition of

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<sup>229</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 23, 28, quoted in Reza Alijani, *Rend-e kham: Shariati-shenasi jeld-e yekom: zamaneh, zendegi, va arman-ha (The Pure Nonconformist: Shariatology Volume One: Era, Life, and Ideals)* (Tehran: Ghalam 1387), 169-170.

<sup>230</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 23, 131, quoted in Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 170.

<sup>231</sup> Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 170.

the relationship between the self and its others. For Shariati, "it is only in relation with the other and through knowing the other that one discovers and arrives at the self."<sup>232</sup> From this perspective, there is no contradiction between self-consciousness and a religious ontology, because according to Shariati, religion's call to attend to the transcendental sources of the self is indeed a call to self-consciousness. In his view, by highlighting the very "existential condition" of the individual subject, a spiritual-religious worldview seeks to guide humans toward the most complete state of self-consciousness.<sup>233</sup> Moreover, Alijani reminds us that for Shariati faith is ultimately a "personal experience" that begins with a deep philosophical questioning about one's place in being and a journey toward existential self-consciousness.<sup>234</sup>

Similarly, Shariati does not see a contradiction between religious faith and human autonomy. Defining the former as a conscious commitment to the other and to a set of transcendental values, Shariati argues that such a commitment necessarily requires free choice and the free exercise of human autonomy.<sup>235</sup> Contrary to Vahdat's view that Shariati's thought recognizes human freedom only as an attribute of the absolute sovereignty of God, in his writings Shariati makes numerous references to the innate value of human freedom. According to Shariati, "human freedom, dignity, and consciousness are not things to be sacrificed, even

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<sup>232</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 24, 19, quoted in Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 172.

<sup>233</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 24, 22, quoted in Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 172.

<sup>234</sup> Alijani, *Rend-e kham*, 170-173.

<sup>235</sup> Ali Shariati, "Khodsazi-e enghelabi" ("Revolutionary Self-Preparedness"), 1355/1976, C.W. 2, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

in the name of God."<sup>236</sup> Thus, one of Shariati's contemporary intellectual followers makes a case that if monotheism constitutes one tenet of Shariati's philosophical thought the other tenet is undoubtedly human freedom.<sup>237</sup>

While Vahdat believes that Shariati's religious ontology ultimately leads to the rejection of democratic rights and freedoms, Shariati himself considers the modern notions of "political, intellectual, artistic, and religious freedoms, and the freedom of making choices and living life from within" as some of the "most glorious achievements of humanity in the course of our evolution."<sup>238</sup> In his view, the suppression of intellectual freedom and pluralism inevitably leads to cultural and civilizational stagnation and decay. Thus, he writes, "if we believe in the possibility of evolution, then we must regard even the slightest deviation from the principles of freedom of conscience and ... intellectual diversity and innovation as nothing short of a tragedy."<sup>239</sup>

It was already mentioned that Shariati's attempt to reconcile religious ontology and human freedom was informed, in part, by his view about the philosophical crisis of modernity and the ontological abandonment of the other in modern Western philosophical thought. As one neo-Shariati figure points out, Shariati rightly or wrongly believed that Western philosophy was ultimately unable to resolve the crisis of the diremption of the modern subject, and that even

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<sup>236</sup> Ali Shariati, C.W. 35, 549, quoted in Masoomeh Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi az yek zed-e filsoof: derang-haayii degar-andishaaneh dar matni bi-payan beh nam-e doctor Ali Shariati (A Philosophical Reading of an Anti-Philosopher: Alternative Reflections on an Endless Text Called Dr. Ali Shariati)* (Tehran: Ghalam, 1386/2007), 43.

<sup>237</sup> Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi*, 38.

<sup>238</sup> Shariati, "Khodsazi-e enghelabi."

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.



in its socialist and humanist accounts modern Western thought led to "individualism" and a belief in the "futility of sacrifice for the other."<sup>240</sup> Similarly, Shariati's political biographer, Ali Rahnama, notes that even though Shariati was deeply influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's brand of existentialist philosophy, he was nevertheless unsatisfied with the centrality of the concept of *bon sens* or common sense in Sartre's thought, and argued for the need to locate individual freedom and autonomy within a more transcendental ethical and moral order.<sup>241</sup>

It is in a religiously mediated form of humanism and a religious-spiritual worldview that Shariati and his contemporary intellectual followers find a higher moral order that is capable of turning the modern subject toward its others. Thus, Ehsan Shariati argues that while there may exist some common ground between Shariati's triad of "freedom-equality-spiritually" and the French Revolution's slogan of "liberty, equality, and fraternity," the non-religious ontology of the latter formulation does not go far enough to address the real philosophical crisis of the modern subject. "Fraternity," Ehsan Shariati argues, is a call for "social solidarity" and for human "cooperation and coexistence." In his view, while this call marks a positive and progressive turn in the historical development of Western modernity, it lacks the necessary philosophical and metaphysical grounding to foster a real sense of existential togetherness. In the absence of these foundations, he argues, the abstract notions of fraternity and solidarity are turned into the formalistic concept of "social contract" and a legalistic framework for advancing a set of

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<sup>240</sup> Hossein Mesbahian, "Shariati va nam-e khoda" ("Shariati and the Name of God"), in *Din va ideology (Religion and Ideology)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (no publisher/no date), 230.

<sup>241</sup> Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 127.

social policies. In Ehsan Shariati's view, while "genuine spirituality" also calls for social solidarity and a commitment to social welfare, it does not reduce humanity to its material needs and seeks higher transcendental meaning and a strong ontological bond between the individual and the whole of existence.<sup>242</sup>

For Shariati and his intellectual followers, the core of spirituality is love, or a radical ontological turn toward the other. Shariati argues that in a world characterized by a prevailing absence of meaning, "love has the power to call us to negate and to rebel against the self, beyond any rationale and reason ..., for a [higher] cause and for the other."<sup>243</sup> Nevertheless, for Shariati's contemporary intellectual followers, the possibility of a spiritually-inspired negation of the self does not amount to a rejection of human subjectivity and the surrender of individual agency. Among others, Ehsan Shariati distinguishes Shariati's "humanist" spirituality from other types of spirituality, which he regards as "anti-humanist" and "destructive." While the former is attentive to human needs and various social concerns, the latter "essentially puts the social question aside."<sup>244</sup> Anti-humanist spirituality, argues Ehsan Shariati, is the polar opposite of Enlightenment humanism. One rejects human autonomy, freedom, and dignity in the name of submission to God or nature, while the other assumes the supremacy of the individual over all of the existence and denies any sense of natural or transcendental belonging.<sup>245</sup> Susan Shariati, likewise, believes that the spiritual re-negotiation of the modern self-other binary in Shariati's thought seeks "neither to

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<sup>242</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab, no date (unpublished).

<sup>243</sup> Ali Shariat, C.W. 25, 158, quoted in Mesbahian, "Shariati va nam-e khoda," 231.

<sup>244</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

turn the self into the other nor the other into the self, but instead to give recognition to both and to make possible the experience of togetherness."<sup>246</sup> Similarly, Hossein Mesbahian believes that Shariati's spiritual turn to the other represents, not a negation of human subjectivity, but rather an attempt to provoke the possibility of an ethical negotiation of the modern subject.<sup>247</sup>

In "Shariati and the Name of God," Mesbahian challenges the reading of Shariati's religious ontology as an anti-democratic theory of collectivist subjectivity. Distinguishing Shariati's radical re-interpretation of the name of God from the traditional conceptions of deity, Mesbahian charges Vahdat with failing to note this major distinction and assuming a monolithic (traditionalist) conception of the relationship between God and the human subject. According to Mesbahian, Shariati was himself a radical critic of the traditional religious view of humans as "powerless instruments" of a "powerful God," and as "mere objects in the pre-determination of invisible forces."<sup>248</sup> At the same time, he argues, in developing his particular account of human autonomy Shariati was attentive to the crisis of modern subjectivity and sought to avoid Enlightenment modernity's normative trap of "reducing the existence to the individual, and reducing the individual to ... abstract and barren rationalism."<sup>249</sup> In this regard, Mesbahian sees parallels between Shariati's attempt to curb the destructive tendencies of uninhibited subjectivity by appealing to the ontological possibilities of

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<sup>246</sup> Suasan Shariati, "Paradox-haay-e vojdan-e asheghaneh dar negah-e shariati" ("The Paradoxes of the Loving Consciousness in Shariati's Thought"), *Madreseh* no. 3, Ordibehesht 1385/May 2006, <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=123> (accessed 2 March 2011).

<sup>247</sup> Hossein Mesbahian, interview by author (Internet/Oovoo), 23 April 2013.

<sup>248</sup> Mesbahian, "Shariati va nam-e khoda," 227.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

emancipatory religious thought, and the turn to the name of God by a two prominent twentieth century Jewish European thinkers: Theodor Adorno, and Emmanuel Lévinas.

Drawing on an essay by David Kaufmann entitled "Adorno and the Name of God," Mesbahian points to Adorno's treatment of God's name in the Jewish tradition as a potential ontological basis for an ethical re-negotiating of modern subjectivity.<sup>250</sup> According to Kaufmann, Adorno saw the prohibition on speaking God's name in the Jewish tradition as a major step in the direction of rationalizing metaphysics and freeing human beings from the grip of mythology. While traditional metaphysics was characterized by a prevailing belief in the "unavoidability of immanence," Judaism sought to break away from this pre-determinism "by making the divine Name transcendent ... as an indication that the world could in fact be different."<sup>251</sup> According to Kaufmann, in his attempt to reconcile the tension between modern subjectivity and universality Adorno sought "to redeem the ... emancipatory semantic potential of Jewish theology and speculative metaphysics."<sup>252</sup> In the name of God, he argues, Adorno found "a model for and an index of an ontology, of a metaphysical experience of the absolute, in an era of equivalence and ineluctable mediation."<sup>253</sup>

Mesbahian believes that the turn to the name of God in contemporary Western philosophy finds one of its most sophisticated manifestations in the ideas

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<sup>250</sup> Mesbahian, "Shariati va nam-e khoda," 211.

<sup>251</sup> David Kaufman, "Adorno and the Name of God," *Flashpoint* 1, no. 1 (1996), <http://webdelsol.com/FLASHPOINT/adorno.htm> (accessed 2 May 2011).

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

of Lévinas. Citing passages from *Otherwise Than Being: Or Beyond Essence* (1974), and *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (1982), Mesbahian argues that Levinas attempted to explain the necessary condition for moral responsibility toward the other by appealing to the notion of the moral presence of God. According to Mesbahian, Levinas sought "to preserve the name of God as the bearing witness to responsibility." By examining alternative understandings of the relationship between God and philosophy, he argues, Levinas re-imagined the modern self-other dichotomy. Mesbahian distinguishes Levinas's notion of responsibility towards the other from the "classical liberal" conception of a "rational social contract" binding together "atomized, self-referential, and self-sufficient" individuals. In his view, the kind of ethical responsibility that Levinas is after strengthens social "solidarity" and "cooperation," while also serving the genuine exercise of individual rights and freedoms.<sup>254</sup>

In Mesbahian's reading, Shariati too believed that a radical re-conceptualization of the name of God had the potential "to initiate a different understanding of being; one which necessitates a 'restructuring of the world and the search for a new human.'" <sup>255</sup> He argues that for Shariati, the name symbolized "meaning in existence" and "eternal and interrupted love and care for the other." In his view, Shariati's call to return to the transcendental sources of the self served as an ontological basis for negotiating an alternative to uninhibited Cartesian subjectivity. Mesbahian rejects Vahdat's contention that Shariati's religious ontology ultimately arrived at human submission to God's will and the surrender

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<sup>254</sup> Mesbahian, "Shariati va nam-e khoda," 215.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 228.

of individual subjectivity and agency. He attributes Vahdat's "misreading" to his "non-hermeneutic interpretation of the concept of 'submission.'" According to Mesbahian, Shariati appealed to this religious concept not as a basis for negating human subjectivity, but rather for locating subjectivity in a broader existential and ethical framework. In Shariati's thought, he argues, submission is a transcendental union between the individual, nature, and existence. According to Mesbahian, the social and political manifestation of submission to God is not only a moral responsibility toward the other, but also a total rejection of all relations of domination including political authoritarianism, economic exploitation, and religious tyranny.<sup>256</sup>

In his response to Vahdat's critical assessment of the philosophical foundations of Shariati's thought, Mesbahian accepts the view that Shariati's religious discourse advances a mediated account of human subjectivity, which ultimately seeks to reunite the human subject with its others on the basis of a spiritual ontology. Mesbahian, nevertheless, rejects the claim that a religious/spiritual mediation of subjectivity represents a special case and a unique challenge against the modern notion of human subjectivity. Drawing on the analyses of a wide range of Western critics of Enlightenment philosophy and its Cartesian subject, Mesbahian argues that human subjectivity is not an absolute and uninhibited notion, but rather a relative, contested, and mediated one. He refers to Paul Ricoeur's influential work, *Freud and Philosophy: an Essay on Interpretation* (1965, English tr. 1970), where the French philosopher examines

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<sup>256</sup> Mesbahian, "Shariati va nam-e khoda," 229. Also see: Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi*, 95.

the "demystification" of the concept of modern subjectivity in the works of three "masters of suspicion," namely Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. For Ricoeur, Mesbahian contends, the analyses of these critical thinkers reveals that the modern individual is not merely a product of free and uninhibited choices, but rather of the mode of production (Marx), instincts (Nietzsche), and the unconscious mind (Freud). Mesbahian also points to the efforts of modern philosophers including phenomenologists, post-structuralists, and feminists, to debunk the myth of absolute subjectivity and to negotiate an alternative philosophical basis for negotiating human autonomy and agency. Similarly, in discussing the reclaiming of the emancipatory capacities of Jewish religious ontology by Adorno and Lévinas, Mesbahian makes a case that even within the tradition of German critical theory there has existed an effort to curb the oppressive and destructive tendencies of unmediated subjectivity by appealing to the ontological/inspirational capacities of religious thought.<sup>257</sup>

Mesbahian also rejects Vahdat's claim that Shariati's religious/spiritual mediation of human agency and autonomy represents an undemocratic or collectivist challenge to modern subjectivity. For Mesbahian, in developing his particular discourse of subjectivity in Iranian society, Shariati takes into account the philosophical crises of Enlightenment modernity and modern subjectivity and seeks to advance an account of the free, rights-bearing, and autonomous subject that is compatible with the recognition of the inherent dignity of the other. As such, Mesbahian argues, Shariati's critique of modern subjectivity is essentially a

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<sup>257</sup> Mesbahian, "Shariati va nam-e khoda," 211-216.

democratic and anti-domination critique that should not be mistaken with the collectivist and authenticist rejections of individuality by Islamists and traditionalists. In his view, Shariati's spiritual ontology, which is manifested in his triad of spirituality, equality, and freedom, serves as the basis for developing a contextually grounded and modern alternative to Enlightenment philosophy in the context of Iranian society.<sup>258</sup>

Increasingly in recent years, and as debates on the philosophical foundations of Shariati's thought continue, a new generation of his intellectual followers in post-revolutionary Iran has come to read Shariati's religious ontology and his religious/spiritual negotiation of human agency and autonomy as the theoretical foundations of an indigenous Iranian discourse of modern subjectivity. For these commentators, Shariati's modern reformulation of religious thought in the Iranian-Islamic tradition represents not a turn away from the modern world, but rather a step toward an "Iranian modernity."<sup>259</sup> They reject the reading of Shariati's thought as an anti-democratic collectivist ontology, and find in Shariati's religious discourse the normative basis for an indigenous theory of the rights-bearing individual subject. Distinguishing Shariati's reformist Islam from Islamist and traditionalist conceptions, they argue that Shariati's emphasis on independent human reason, subjectivity, autonomy, and freedom constitutes a radical departure

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<sup>258</sup> Mesbahian, interview.

<sup>259</sup> Faramarz Motamed-Dezfooli, *Kavir: tajrobeh moderniteh irani: tafsir va bazkhani kavir doktor Ali Shariati (The Desert: The Experience of Iranian Modernity: Revisiting and Reinterpreting Dr. Ali Shariati's The Desert)* (Tehran: Ghalam, 1387), 21.



from the theological, juridical, and mystical understandings of religion in traditional Iranian and Islamic thought.<sup>260</sup>

In *The Desert: The Experience of an Iranian Modernity*, Faramarz Motamed-Dezfooli offers a reading of Shariati's spiritual thought as an ontological journey "from the mystical charm of a traditional world ... to independence, subjectivity, and individual autonomy and agency."<sup>261</sup> Examining Shariati's radical interpretation of the traditional Islamic view of the relationship between the God of transcendence and the human subject, he argues that Shariati's Islamic discourse develops an account of "individuated, unmediated, and free" access to transcendence.<sup>262</sup> Motamed-Dezfooli, somewhat provocatively, suggests that while the possibility of meaning in existence and a God of transcendence remains an important aspect of Shariati's thought, it is nevertheless mediated through and reconciled with his belief in human subjectivity. According to him, in Shariati's thought "it is only with the rise of the individual subject that the existence ... comes to being. It is the will and power of the knowing subject that sheds light on being and carries existence forward .... Without this subject the world and all of existence are dark, empty, and behind a veil of unknowability."<sup>263</sup> Although Motamed-Dezfooli sees similarities between Shariati's view and the existentialist conceptions of human subjectivity in the ideas of Jean Paul Sartre and Edmund Husserl, he nevertheless argues that in Shariati's thought subjectivity

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<sup>260</sup> Maghsoud Farasatkhaah, "Shesh tipe roshanfekre dini" ("Six Types of Religious Intellectualism"), *Islah Web*, 15 November 2009 <http://www.islahweb.org/node/2879> (accessed 17 November 2012).

<sup>261</sup> Motamed-Dezfooli, *Kavir*, 24.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

is always negotiated in reference to the other and it is only through this mediation that the subject becomes knowable to itself.<sup>264</sup> In his view, in contemporary Iranian society Shariati's reformist religious discourse has served the development of an indigenous account of the autonomous and rights-bearing subject and has presented an example of modern religiosity.<sup>265</sup>

Masoumeh Aliakbari also believes that Shariati's re-interpretation of the relationship between God and the human subject has contributed to an ontological shift in contemporary Iranian thought. In *A Philosophical Account of an Anti-Philosopher*, and elsewhere, Aliakbari argues that by advancing a contextually negotiated account of modern subjectivity Shariati challenges the key characteristic of traditional Iranian thought, namely the assumption of an absolute and predetermined divine will.<sup>266</sup> She does not deny the centrality of divine sovereignty in Shariati's thought. Nevertheless, she maintains that contrary to Vahdat's view, the relationship between divine sovereignty and individual subjectivity is not automatically restrictive and mutually exclusive.<sup>267</sup> According to her, in his spiritual writings Shariati offers an account of divine sovereignty that is in harmony with human subjectivity and which enhances individual agency. In Shariati's account, she argues, divine sovereignty is not treated as the

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<sup>264</sup> Motamed-Dezfooli, *Kavir*, 327.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>266</sup> Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi*, 94.

<sup>267</sup> Masoomeh Aliakbari, "Derangi dar zehniat-e ba vaseteh: naghdi bar nazar Farzin Vahdat" ("A Reflection on Mediated Subjectivity: A Critique of Farzin Vahdat's Theory," in *Din va ideology* (*Religion and Ideology*), ed. Bonyad Shariati (no publisher/no date), 369.

negation of human subjectivity, but rather as the inspirational source that gives the human subject "a God-like confidence to take action in the world."<sup>268</sup>

Aliakbari makes a case that in his modern narrative of the monotheistic story of creation in *Hoboot* (C.W. 13), Shariati fundamentally challenges the image of an all-powerful God and a "dependent" human subject.<sup>269</sup> In *Hoboot*, she argues, God leaves humanity to its own device and orders it to author its own destiny. Through the exercise of its autonomy and agency the human subject reunites with the God of transcendence in the creation of being.<sup>270</sup> For Aliakbari, then, *Hoboot* is "the pinnacle of Shariati's humanist interpretation of the relationship between the individual and deity."<sup>271</sup> According to her, Shariati does not see a contradiction between divine and human sovereignty and regards the two to be "essentially intertwined."<sup>272</sup> She suggests that by making freedom one of the two central tenets of his worldview, Shariati offers a "post-religious" (*fara-dini*) interpretation of the relationship between the individual and God.<sup>273</sup>

In Aliakbari's reading, Shariati's religious philosophy is an uncompromising discourse of human freedom.<sup>274</sup> In her view, Shariati is not only an advocate of positive freedom or "emancipation," but also of negative freedoms and "liberal" rights.<sup>275</sup> According to her, Shariati believes that individual freedom is a necessary condition for living life from within and arriving at one's own

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<sup>268</sup> Aliakbari, "Drangi dar zehniat-e ba vaseteh," 371.

<sup>269</sup> Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi*, 94.

<sup>270</sup> Ali Shariati, quoted in Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi*, 94.

<sup>271</sup> Aliakbari, "Drangi dar zehniat-e ba vaseteh," 376.

<sup>272</sup> Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi*, 94.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

"unique truth."<sup>276</sup> Citing several passages from Shariati's works, she argues that Shariati opposes any suppression of freedom and creativity and advocates "unrestricted freedom."<sup>277</sup> In one of these passages, Shariati writes: "The sacred value of human freedom obliges us to ... tolerate our intellectual opponents, even our intellectual enemies, and not prevent them from freely expressing their thoughts and choices ..., and not deny their freedom of thought, research, and choice, which is the holiest of principles, in the name of any sacred principles."<sup>278</sup>

For another commentator, in the context of contemporary Iranian society Shariati's Islamic discourse has contributed to the negotiation of modern thought by giving recognition to "the self-conscious subject."<sup>279</sup> According to sociologist, Mohammad-Amin Ghaneirad, in traditional Iranian and Islamic thought the relationship between the individual and deity is based on complete submission and eventual annihilation. Similarly, he argues, the relationship between the individual and the collective is one of total obliteration of the former in the latter. Modern thought, Ghaneirad contends, is not possible without assuming a "distance" between the human subject and God, and between "the individual and the collective."<sup>280</sup> According to him, by developing a system of knowledge in religious thought that gives recognition to the modern subject, Shariati has

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<sup>276</sup> Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi*, 43.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>278</sup> Shariati, M.A. 26, 174, quoted in Aliakbari, *Ghera-ati falsafi*, 45.

<sup>279</sup> Mohammad-Amin Ghaneirad, "Panel," in *Shariati dar daneshgah (Shariati at the University)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Bonyad Farhangi-e Doctor Ali Shariati, 1390/2011), 66.

<sup>280</sup> Ghaneirad, "Panel," 65.

contributed to the grounding of modern thought and modern social sciences in Iranian society.<sup>281</sup>

Ghaneirad argues that Shariati's religious discourse re-defines "the relationship between the individual and God in a way that [makes] possible the emergence of 'human' with innate dignity."<sup>282</sup> In his view, contrary to the traditional Islamic mystical view of "unity of being" (*vahdat-e vojud*), in Shariati's "unitarian" (*towhid-e vojud*) worldview "there exists a distance between God and humans and the latter cannot ... be annihilated in the former." For Shariati, Ghaneirad argues, human autonomy and freedom entails the freedom to rebel against all sources of authority including God.<sup>283</sup> Distinguishing between the traditional Islamic concept of *fana-fillah* (annihilation in God) and Shariati's unitarian view, Ghaneirad concludes that Shariati's call for a return to God and the "annihilation of the individualistic self in the transcendental human self" is not a negation of human subjectivity, but rather an ontological re-orientation of the self toward the other.<sup>284</sup>

## Conclusion

Ali Shariati's political philosophy is seen by some of his critics as having had its foundations in an anti-Enlightenment religious ontology that negated the modern ideas of democracy, secularism, human rights and freedoms. For critics such as

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<sup>281</sup> Ghaneirad, "Panel," 64.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 90-94.

Mirsepasi and Vahdat, Shariati's religious discourse ultimately served his collectivist sociopolitical ideology and his preoccupation with revolutionary mobilization against the Pahlavi regime. Shariati's religious discourse is seen by these and other critics as having been instrumental both in the initiation and success of the 1979 Revolution, as well as in the post-revolutionary turn away from modernity through the imposition of restrictions on individual freedoms and democratic rights. In critiquing Shariati's encounter with modernity, these commentators often make a direct link between modern sociopolitical notions such as popular sovereignty, separation of religious and political power, democracy, human rights and freedoms, equal citizenship, etc. and the philosophical foundations of the European Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, in these accounts, serves as the singular reference point for defining modernity and any deviation from Enlightenment and its rationalist principles is seen as a total or partial negation of modernity.

As the discussions in Chapters Two and Three showed, Shariati's general approach toward Enlightenment modernity was to distinguish between its emancipatory and oppressive capacities and legacies. Though he acknowledged the progressive legacy of Enlightenment thought in emancipating the modern subject from the hold of tradition, he nevertheless rejected the binaries of modern reason versus religious reason and of human subject versus nature and transcendence. Following Iqbal's modern reading of Islamic thought, Shariati's religious discourse sought to reconcile modern reason and subjectivity with their others. Highlighting this intellectual legacy, Shariati's intellectual followers in

post-revolutionary Iran reject the reading of his thought as an anti-democratic ontology of divine sovereignty. They argue that for Shariati, political power becomes legitimate only through the collective will of free human subjects. They draw attention to the centrality of human freedom in Shariati's thought, and argue that Shariati's humanist restructuring of Islam's religious thought contributed to the development of the normative ground for an indigenous discourse of individual rights and freedoms in Iranian society.

As this chapter has argued, neo-Shariatis and Shariati's other intellectual followers have also advanced a reading of Shariati's religious thought as a contextually negotiated discourse of modern subjectivity in the Iranian context. Distinguishing Shariati's reformist discourse from traditionalist and Islamist religious discourses, these commentators credit Shariati with reconciling the traditional notion of divine sovereignty with the modern conception of human subjectivity. For this group of Iranian thinkers, Shariati's deconstruction of conventional religious truths, including the traditional concept of God, offers a humanist understanding of the relationship between deity and the human subject. As such, they argue, by presenting an account of individual and personal access to transcendence, Shariati's thought serves the recognition of diversity and philosophical-political pluralism in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran. Shariati's contemporary intellectual followers further believe that in its attempt to identify an alternative ontological foundation to that of Enlightenment modernity for negotiating a discourse of agency and human emancipation in Iranian society, Shariati's thought contributes to an ongoing effort in the post-colonial era to

negotiate a third way between hegemonic universalism and essentialist particularism, and between Eurocentrism and nativism. This is a theme that will be discussed at some length in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### INDIGENOUS MODERNITY: BEYOND ORIENTALISM AND OCCIDENTALISM?

#### Introduction

As Chapter Four discussed, for critics such as Vahdat and Mirsepassi, Shariati's radical Islamic discourse and his call for a "return" to the sources of the Iranian-Islamic self were part of a broader discourse of authenticity in Iran during the mid-twentieth century. The latter discourse is argued to have emerged in response to the rapid social and cultural modernization policies of the Pahlavi regime, which were regarded by many as efforts toward the top-down Westernization of Iranian society. Drawing parallels between Iranian/Islamic discourses of authenticity and European "counter-Enlightenment" discourses such as German Romanticism and the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, both Vahdat and Mirsepassi describe the intellectual productions of Shariati and a range of other Iranian thinkers in the pre-revolution context as a rejection of the philosophical foundations of the European Enlightenment and a particularistic turn against the universalist ideals of Western modernity. They believe that Shariati, along with a range of prominent (religious and secular) mid-twentieth century Iranian thinkers and activists, including Ahmad Fardid, Jalal Ale-Ahmad, Ehsan Naraghi, Dariush Shayegan, Ruhollah Khomeini, and Morteza Motahari, promoted a nativist and

culturalist reconfiguration of modernity as a counter-force to Western cultural hegemony.

Other commentators too have described Shariati's Islamic discourse as part of an emerging discourse of anti-Westernism in pre-revolution Iran.<sup>285</sup> They argue that for Shariati and other intellectual advocates of nativism, the West represented an oppositional binary, an enemy, and the source of all social, cultural, economic, and political ills in Iranian society. According to one commentator, Shariati's Islamic ideology properly belongs within a larger Iranian discourse of Occidentalism, or Orientalism in reverse. In *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (1996), Mehrzad Boroujerdi argues that Orientalism in reverse shares Orientalism's monolithic categories of East and West, and defines itself in a total negational opposition to the latter. Like Vahdat and Mirsepassi, Boroujerdi believes that Shariati and other advocates of the discourse of authenticity contributed to the popularization of a nativist call in Iran "for the resurgence, reinstatement or continuance of native or indigenous cultural customs, beliefs, and values."<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, Boroujerdi argues that the discourses of Orientalism in reverse and nativism are characterized by a "compulsive tendency to fetishize and celebrate difference."<sup>287</sup> In particular, as Chapter One pointed out, for Boroujerdi the ultimate aim of Shariati's ideological project was to reclaim the authentic existence of his Islamic and Oriental society

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<sup>285</sup> See: B. Hanson, "The 'Westoxication' of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 1 (1983): 1–23; Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004); Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The New Intellectuals in Iran," *Social Compass* 51 no. 2 (June 2004): 91–202.

<sup>286</sup> Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 14.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

vis-à-vis such monolithic categories as the modern West or the Christian Occident.<sup>288</sup>

The previous four chapters challenged this reading of Shariati's thought and suggested, instead, that rather than viewing the West or Western modernity as monolithic categories, Shariati advocated a selective approach toward both. A case was made that in advancing a discourse of indigenous modernity in pre- and post-revolutionary Iranian society, Shariati and his contemporary intellectual followers have sought to go beyond the hegemonic and totalizing East-West and tradition-modernity binaries that have dominated Iran's intellectual space for over a century. Nevertheless, the critiques of commentators such as Vahdat, Mirsepassi, and Boroujerdi point to an important feature of Shariati's thought which must not be ignored or considered uncritically. As the following discussion will reveal, Shariati defines and outlines his project of indigenous modernity within a civilizational framework in which the categories of East and West occupy a central place. Does Shariati's civilizational discourse and his call to return to the sources of the Iranian-Islamic self amount to a hostile and nativist rejection of the West and a discourse of Orientalism in reverse, as his critics charge? Or does the civilizational framework of Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity allow for a radical re-negotiation of the East-West binary and a simultaneous critique of the discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism, as his contemporary intellectual followers argue? These are the questions that the present chapter seeks to answer.

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<sup>288</sup> Boroujerdi, *Iranian intellectuals and the West*, 109.

The chapter begins with an overview of the civilizational framework of Shariati's project of indigenous modernity. It will be shown that Shariati saw the discourse of civilization (*tamadon*) as a bottom-up and contextually grounded alternative to the hegemonic and state-sponsored discourse of modernization (*tajadod*). I argue that for Shariati the project of indigenous modernity represents not only an attempt to negotiate contextually grounded visions of sustainable sociopolitical change, but also a radical move toward a post-colonial discourse of cosmopolitanism and civilizational diversity. Drawing on the deconstruction of the East-West binary by a range of contemporary scholars, the chapter then seeks to highlight some of the potential limitations as well as capacities of the civilizational frame of analysis for critiquing the hegemonic formulations of categories of East and West and for negotiating an alternative to the dichotomous discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism. The final section examines some of the ways in which neo-Shariatis have read and advanced Shariati's civilizational framework. I argue that for neo-Shariatis Shariati's civilizational discourse aims to radically re-conceptualize the prevailing East-West binary and to negotiate a third way between hegemonic universalism (represented by the discourse of Western/Enlightenment modernity) and essentialist particularism (represented by Islamism, traditionalism, and ethnic nationalism). The chapter's conclusion suggests that in a critical and constructive conversation with other contemporary advocates of post-Orientalism and post-Occidentalism neo-Shariatis can further advance Shariati's simultaneous and radical deconstruction of hegemonic universalism and essentialist particularism in contemporary Iranian society, and

expand on his cosmopolitan solidarities with global emancipatory discourses and struggles.

### **Shariati and the Civilizational Framework: Toward a Cosmopolitan Post-Colonialism**

In the context of mid-twentieth century Iran, Shariati presents his civilizational discourse as an alternative to the prevailing and state-sponsored discourse of modernization. In a lecture titled "Civilization and Modernization" (*tamadon va tajadod*), he proposes that genuine development requires not the top-down imposition of the appearances of Western modernity, but instead a radical bottom-up change on the basis of a sustained critical engagement with the cultural/civilizational resources of each society.<sup>289</sup> He also distinguishes between two different meanings of the term "civilization." According to him, in a particular or specific sense civilization means "the combination of the experiences and achievements of a particular people or society." In this sense, the category is used to distinguish between different human experiences in distinct historical and geographical contexts.<sup>290</sup> As the representations of the collective historical achievements of different human societies, civilizations also provide the inhabitants of these societies with a sense of belonging, as well as the condition for self-consciousness and self-realization. In this sense, civilization refers to the evolution of a human society toward the self-consciousness of its members

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<sup>289</sup> Ali Shariati, "Tamadon va tajadod" ("Civilization and Modernization"), 1348/1969, C.W. 31, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>290</sup> Ali Shariati, "Farhang va ideology" ("Culture and Ideology"), 1350/1971, C.W. 23, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

through a "bottom-up, conscious, and creative" movement and an organic shift in worldviews and value systems. Thus, Shariati argues, an appropriate measure of civilization in a society is not material wealth or even the level of urbanization and scientific/technological advancement, but rather "the openness of its worldview ... and the extent of its [inhabitants'] self-consciousness."<sup>291</sup>

In a universal or general sense, on the other hand, civilization is "the combination of all of the spiritual and material experiences and achievements of our common humanity."<sup>292</sup> Shariati believes that while historically there have existed several civilizations with different characteristics, norms, and structures, all major civilizations also represent the prevailing collective human values and achievements and carry the legacies of civilizations that came before them.<sup>293</sup> He refers to studies by French linguist Émile Benvenist (1902-1976) about the cross cultural commonalities between linguistic structures to support his view that all human civilizations have a common source.<sup>294</sup> It appears then that for Shariati, even in its particular sense civilization has a universal aspect. He argues that all historical and modern civilizations are different manifestations of a single human civilization that takes distinct forms in diverse contexts.<sup>295</sup> According to Shariati, if we understand civilization as a universal category and as the "accumulated material and spiritual experiences and achievements of a collective humanity,"

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<sup>291</sup> Ali Shariati, "Bahs-e kolli raje beh tamadon va farhang" ("General Discussion about Civilization and Culture"), 1348/1969, C.W. 11, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>292</sup> Shariati, "Farhang va ideology."

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ali Shariati, "Bahs-e kolli raje beh tamadon va farhang."

<sup>295</sup> Shariati, "Farhang va ideology." Also see: Ali Shariati, "Chera asaatiir rooh-e hameye tamadon-hay-e doniast?" ("Why Mythology is the Spirit of All World Civilizations"), 1348/1969, C.W. 11, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

then we cannot speak of civilization strictly in "Islamic," "Christian," "Chinese," "Indian," "Eastern," or "Western" terms.<sup>296</sup> Instead, we must recognize that while cultural and scientific productions in a particular geographical zone may go through periods of growth and decline, the ongoing process of human civilization operates in multiple sites and across cultural and geographical boundaries. Thus, even though Shariati argues that historically human civilization began in Mesopotamia, he holds that in the course of time it continually shifted sites until the present time and will continue to change sites in the future.<sup>297</sup>

According to Shariati, at least since the eighteenth century the modern world has been characterized by the rise of the Western civilization and the decline of non-Western civilizations. His thought does not offer a systematic theoretical account about the conditions and mechanisms for the rise and fall of civilizations, or the processes through which civilizational production changes sites from one geographical zone to the next.<sup>298</sup> Nevertheless, like his treatment of modernity his analysis of civilization often advances a critique of historical, cultural, and economic meta-narratives and highlights the multiplicity of, and the dynamic between, internal and external factors. Hence, in examining the rise of the modern West Shariati is simultaneously attentive to the consequences of the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the transition from feudalism to capitalism, as well as to the influence of non-European cultures

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<sup>296</sup> Ali Shariati, "Tamadon chist?" ("What is Civilization?"), 1349/1970, C.W. 11, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> For Shariati's discussions on the historical rise and fall of world civilizations see: C.W. 11: *The History of Civilization – volume 1 (Tarikh-e tamadon – jeld-e 1)*, C.W. 12: *The History of Civilization – volume 2 (Tarikh-e tamadon – jeld-e 2)*, C.W. 14: *The History and Analysis of Religions – volume 1 (Tarikh va shenakht adian – jeld-e 1)*, C.W. *The History and Analysis of Religions – volume 2 (Tarikh va shenakht adian – jeld-e 2)*.

and civilizations, and the role of European colonialism since the fifteenth century. He believes that like all other historical civilizations, the modern West is the product of cross-cultural and cross-civilizational encounters, and throughout his writings and lectures he makes repeated references to the material and cultural contributions of Islamic, Indian, Chinese, and other civilizations to the rise of modernity in Europe and the formation of the modern Western civilization.

While Shariati sees all civilizations, including the modern West, as manifestations of a universal human civilization, he nevertheless believes that with the rise of European colonialism we are, for the first time in history, faced with a globalized and singular civilization that actively seeks to exclude all other cultural and civilizational legacies. According to Shariati: "In the past, we did not have a singular global civilization. That is to say that each nation, each race, each people had its own particular resources in the form of its own culture and civilization ... and all of those diverse cultures are now being destroyed in the assault of industrial European modernity which is fast becoming a globalized and singular civilization."<sup>299</sup> In a section titled, "The Death and Decline of Diverse Human Cultures and Civilizations and the Formation of a Single Global Civilization," in the *The History of Civilization (taikh-e tamadon)*, Shariati writes,

Today, we see on earth another grave crime, and that is the death of diverse human cultures and civilizations which historically existed and each had different sensitivities, colors, smells, preferences, and directions. In the past, Romans, Iranians, Arabs, Chinese, Blacks, and others each had their particular cultures and civilizations. But today, Europe, with its violent mechanistic civilization is slaughtering all other cultures and replacing them with its own civilization. So now

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<sup>299</sup> Ali Shariati, "Khosoosiat-e ghoroon-e mosaaser" ("The Particularities of the Modern Centuries"), 1347/1968, C.W. 12, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.



everyone talks the same way, and about the same things. Cities, buildings, attire, relations between men and women and everything else everywhere in the world has been homogenized and a singular global cultural and civilizational framework has been imposed. We no longer have inwardly Eastern culture and outwardly Western culture. Chinese ingenuity is today expressed in European forms and the result cannot be anything other than what has been thought of and imagined once before. This is a major obstacle against the realization of human ingenuity and it is the death of difference and of cultural, spiritual, artistic, intellectual, civilizational, and human evolution.<sup>300</sup>

According to Shariati, by advancing a Eurocentric discourse of civilization, leading Western thinkers since the eighteenth century have played a major role in facilitating European colonialism and imperialism and the formation of a globalized modern order.<sup>301</sup> In his view, failing to recognize that the modern West was only the latest manifestation of an ongoing and ever-evolving human civilization and one that bears the legacies of civilizations past, contemporary European sociologists, historians, and philosophers have advanced an account of Western modernity as the singular human civilization and the end point of evolution and progress. The non-West, Shariati argues, is either regarded as the lesser civilizations, as in the case of the Eastern civilizations (Indian, Chinese, and Islamic), or its civilization and culture is denied altogether, as in the case of black Africa. For European thinkers, he contends, Asian and African societies must either follow in the footsteps of the modern West and join the civilization camp, or forever remain inferior to the West and its civilizational achievements.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Shariati, "Khosroosiat-e ghoroon mosaaser."

<sup>301</sup> Shariati, "Tamadon chist?"

<sup>302</sup> Ali Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish" ("Return to the Self"), 1350/1972, C.W. 4, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

Furthermore, Shariati maintains that by erasing all traces of non-Western civilizations and their contributions to modern human achievements the Eurocentric discourses of modernity serve the critical function of convincing Europeans of their own superiority and justifying the imposition of a particular civilizational model on the whole planet.<sup>303</sup> In his view, while European expansionism into Asia and Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often went hand in hand with a civilizational rhetoric, the real aim of Western imperialism was to incorporate non-Western societies into a global system of capitalist modernity and to turn them into consumers of European goods. As such, Shariati argues that by undermining the diverse historical characters and traditional cultures of the Third World, imperialism seeks to impose homogenized and predetermined patterns of production and consumption on a planetary scale.<sup>304</sup> In this globalized modern civilization, he believes, the individual is a mere laborer and consumer and it no longer matters "whether you live in Tehran or in ... Paris."<sup>305</sup>

While he criticizes Western thinkers for their Eurocentrism, Shariati is particularly critical of Third World intellectuals who accept the premise of Western supremacy and who call for the Westernization of their societies and the imitation of the Western civilizational model.<sup>306</sup> According to Shariati,

While in Europe they have come to realize the emptiness and meaninglessness of the [modern] order, in the Third World many

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<sup>303</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

<sup>304</sup> Ali Shariati, "Cheh bayad kard?" ("What is to be Done?"), 1350/1971, C.W. 20, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>305</sup> Ali Shariati, "Chegooneh mandan" ("How to Stay"), 1355/1976, C.W. 2, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>306</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

[politicians and intellectuals] are busy drafting several-year programs to join the civilizational camp. If instead of blindly imitating Europe's mechanistic civilization the Third World chooses the path of self-awareness, then [Third World] societies will not only join civilization, they will also create a new and dynamic civilization. Then Fanon's words that we do not want another Europe in Africa will be truly realized, and the Third World can fulfill the [humanist] promise of European modernity which Europe failed to fulfill.<sup>307</sup>

In his view, the discourse of modernization that many Third World intellectuals reproduce in their local contexts is aimed at destroying non-European cultures and civilizations and replacing them with new patterns of consumption in the context of a globalized capitalist modernity.<sup>308</sup> He argues that, "If developing countries continue on their current path they will forever remain consumers of Europe both spiritually and materially. But if the intellectuals in these countries arrive at some sense of collective self-consciousness, then they can potentially change the fate of the Third World and humanity."<sup>309</sup>

Shariati sees the mid-twentieth century anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements around the world, and the increasing disillusionment with Europe's "mechanistic" civilization and its promise of modernity, as hopeful signs pointing to alternative civilizational possibilities. He argues that one of the key features of the late phase of "the new civilization" is a deep suspicion and disbelief in the superiority of Western values both in the West and in the non-West. In the West, Shariati believes, this disillusionment has taken the form of a critical reassessment of the foundations of European modernity, while in the Third World it is manifested in a popular rejection of Westernization and homogenization of human

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<sup>307</sup> Shariati, "Khosroosiat-e ghoroon-e mosaaser."

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

societies.<sup>310</sup> According to him, increasingly after the eruption of World War I in Europe, the claim that European modernity represents the highest and most complete form of human civilization has come to be seriously questioned.<sup>311</sup> In the mid-twentieth century world, he argues, Europe no longer has faith in its own civilizational superiority and non-Europe no longer wants to imitate its former colonial master. In Shariati's view, the loss of faith in the modern epistemic regime and its social, scientific, and philosophical tenets is an indication of the decline of the present civilization and the birth of alternative possibilities.<sup>312</sup> Thus, he argues, increasingly European, Asian, and African intellectuals are drawing attention to the "plurality of civilizational possibilities for our present and future."<sup>313</sup>

In Shariati's thought, moving beyond Eurocentrism requires giving recognition to the civilizational diversity that has historically shaped different human societies and negotiating alternative and indigenous modernities on the basis of the particular contextual/local determinants and the distinct civilizational/cultural resources of each society.<sup>314</sup> This is the sentiment captured in Shariati's discourse of "return to the self" (*bazgasht beh khish*). The discourse, according to Shariati, is informed by the recognition that there is no unilinear, fixed, and predetermined path to modernity and that "each society must reach its own enlightenment on the basis of its own history and culture, and by relying on

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<sup>310</sup> Ali Shariati, "Vijegihaaye tamadon-e emrooz" ("The Characteristics of Today's Civilization"), 1348/1969, C.W. 12, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

the existing popular memory, culture, and language."<sup>315</sup> The idea, he insists, is not to call for a return to a romanticized vision of an ethnic or racial past, but rather to re-negotiate modernity on the basis of "a worldview that corresponds to local social and cultural realities."<sup>316</sup> Thus, Shariati believes that the thesis of return should not be understood as a religious or Islamic rejection of modernity, but instead as a post-colonial reclaiming of modernity whose advocates have included such figures as Martinique-born French thinker Aimé Césaire, Indian anticolonial leader Mahatma Gandhi, Tanzanian post-independence leader Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Kenyan post-independence leader Jomo Kenyatta, Senegalese politician and intellectual Léopold Sédar Senghor, Algerian anti-colonial leader Amar Ouzegane, Algerian novelist and playwright Kateb Yacine, and Iranian intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad.<sup>317</sup> He also names Iranian-born revolutionary Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani and India-born philosopher Muhammad Iqbal as two pioneers of the discourse of return in Muslim societies.<sup>318</sup> For Shariati, the call for negotiating an alternative to colonial modernity by these intellectual and political figures constitutes an attempt to emancipate the people of their societies from cultural, political, and economic manifestations of European colonialism.<sup>319</sup> Furthermore, the thesis of return to the self is seen by Shariati as a radical

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<sup>315</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

<sup>316</sup> Shariati, "Vijegihaaye tamadon-e emrooz."

<sup>317</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ali Shariati, "Bazgasht beh kodam khish?" ("Return to Which Self?"), 1350/1971, C.W. 4, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

embrace of cultural/civilizational diversity and difference.<sup>320</sup> The return to the self, in his view, is not a rejection of the other, but rather the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of both the self and the other. Thus, Shariati argues that arriving at the ideals of human unity and solidarity requires not the homogenization of human societies, but rather the recognition of our *de facto* civilizational cosmopolitanism.<sup>321</sup>

Drawing on the ideas of a wide range of anti-colonial Third World thinkers and building on the intellectual legacies of Afghani and Iqbal, Shariati sets out to advance an emancipatory post-colonial discourse of return to the self in the context of mid-twentieth century Iranian society. In developing his particular discourse Shariati is also harshly critical of what he sees as misguided, backwards, and fascistic discourses of return that reproduce the hegemonic universalism of colonial modernity by dismissing all other human experiences and achievements. The point of return to the Iranian self, he argues, is not to perpetuate the colonial myth that only one civilization has access to valuable and dynamic intellectual and cultural resources. Instead, the aim is to show that Iranians too have possessed civilization and they too have contributed to the formation of a collective human culture and civilization. According to Shariati, by returning to their rich cultural and civilizational resources Iranians would not only be able to reclaim their historical contributions to a collective human civilization, they would also make an invaluable contribution to the negotiation of a

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<sup>320</sup> Ali Shariati, "Estekhrāj va tasfīh manabe farhangī" ("Extraction and Refinement of Cultural Resources"), 1348/1969, C.W. 20, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

<sup>321</sup> Shariati, "Vijegīhaaye tamadon-e emrooz."

civilizational diversity that the decline of Europe promises to bring.<sup>322</sup> As many commentators have noted, and as discussed in previous chapters, in his critical engagement with the cultural and traditional resources of the Iranian civilization Shariati is more attentive to Iran's Islamic-Shi'i past than its pre-Islamic heritage.<sup>323</sup> According to him, while the latter is part of the Iranian self, it is not as central to the contemporary Iranian identity as the dominant Islamic-Shi'i tradition. From this vantage point, Shariati advances his project of indigenous modernity in Iranian society primarily through a critical restructuring of Islamic-Shi'i religious and cultural resources.<sup>324</sup>

As mentioned above, while Shariati is undoubtedly critical of the dominant Eurocentric conceptualization of the East-West civilizational binary the categories of East and West nevertheless feature prominently in his civilizational analysis. Shariati often frames the encounter with colonialism in Iran and other Muslim societies in the language of the decline of the East and the rise of the West, and in discussing the conditions for indigenous modernity in Iran he frequently refers to the civilizational particularities of the East and calls on Muslim intellectuals to attend to the indigenous resources of their Eastern context.<sup>325</sup> Arguably, by using the East-West civilizational framework Shariati tries to highlight the contextual particularities of Iranian society and to problematize Western-centric metanarratives of sociopolitical and socioeconomic

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<sup>322</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

<sup>323</sup> Despite his emphasis on the Islamic-Shi'i sources of the Iranian identity, Shariati also discusses Iran's pre-Islamic civilizational/cultural heritage in a number of his works including in article and lectures collected in the twenty-seventh volume of his collected works, entitled, *Rediscovering the Iranian-Islamic Identity (Bazshenasi-e haviat-e irani-eslami)*.

<sup>324</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

<sup>325</sup> Shariati, "Estekhray va tasfieh manabe farhangi."

development. Time and again he faults Iranian intellectuals, particularly reformist and leftist intellectuals, with failing to sufficiently attend to the historical and cultural particularities of their local context. He believes that the Western terminology and reference points of these intellectuals alienate them from the masses of people who remain predominantly religious and traditional. The Western-centric discourses of Iranian intellectuals, Shariati holds, do not correspond to the Eastern sensibilities of the majority of Iranians. Thus, he calls on progressive intellectuals, religious and non-religious, to pay closer attention to the contextual determinants of Iranian society, which he sees as part of the Eastern and Islamic civilizational traditions.<sup>326</sup>

Despite his repeated references to the categories of East and West, throughout his writings and lectures Shariati persistently challenges the prevailing and Eurocentric conceptions of the East-West civilizational divide. In particular, Shariati is critical of discourses that regard rational and scientific thought as inherently Occidental and spirituality and metaphysics as inherently Oriental. He argues that such a binary is rooted in a colonial framework that sees Europe as having an exclusive monopoly over modernity and the modern civilization.<sup>327</sup> According to him, "because Europeans cannot deny the existence of Eastern civilizations in the same way that they deny the [civilizational past] of the Blacks, they reduce the East to spirituality and metaphysics and juxtapose it against a rational and realist West."<sup>328</sup> Shariati describes this Eurocentric construction of

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<sup>326</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh kodam khish?"

<sup>327</sup> Shariati, "Tamadon chist?"

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.



the East-West binary as a form of "racialized essentialism,"<sup>329</sup> and criticizes a wide range of European intellectuals from Hegel and Nietzsche to Russell for reproducing the myth of the superior West and the inferior East.<sup>330</sup> He castigates leading nineteenth century French Orientalist and philosopher Ernest Renan and twentieth century German sociologist Siegfried Kracauer for holding the view that the Western mind was innately managerial, industrial, bureaucratic, and civilizational, while the Eastern mind was emotional and incapable of rational analysis. He also reprimands Maurice Thorez, French intellectual and long-time leader of the French Communist Party, for arguing that unlike Europeans, Algerians and other North African people were not nations, but rather nations in the process of formation.<sup>331</sup> Furthermore, Shariati is harshly critical of those Iranian intellectuals who accept the civilizational premise of spiritual East and rational West.<sup>332</sup> While he himself calls for a return to the Eastern self, Shariati criticizes some of the Iranian advocates of the discourse of return for reproducing the essentialist conceptions of European Orientalists in their accounts of the Eastern self as the representation of tradition and spirituality and the Western other as the representation of modernity and reason. In Shariati's view, far from advancing a progressive post-colonial position, the discourses of these intellectuals constitute a new form of "traditionalism and fundamentalism."<sup>333</sup> He argues that those who simply re-produce the East-West binary of modern European thought fail to recognize that the relationship between the West and the

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<sup>329</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

<sup>330</sup> Shariati, "Estekhray va tasfieh manabe farhangi"

<sup>331</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

<sup>332</sup> Shariati, "Tamadon chist?"

<sup>333</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

East is the relationship of "colonizer and colonized" and "exploiter and exploited."<sup>334</sup>

Shariati also tries to go beyond the prevailing East-West civilizational binary by drawing attention to the simultaneous existence of science and spirituality in both Eastern and Western civilizational contexts. He believes that rationalist traditions have had a long history in the East and makes a case that contrary to conventional wisdom "naturalism" did not begin in the West, but rather in the East and with the ideas of Lao Tzu.<sup>335</sup> Shariati also points to the contributions of ancient Eastern civilizations (Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian) to mathematics, astronomy, and naval exploration,<sup>336</sup> as well as Indian and Muslim contributions to mathematics, algebra, and physics.<sup>337</sup> He argues that if the East appears more spiritual it is mainly because it has had a longer history of civilization than the West. Defining spirituality as the product of a civilized consciousness, Shariati argues that since the East is the historical birthplace of major civilizations and religions it is only inevitable that spiritually finds a firm ground there. Nevertheless, Shariati also believes that like naturalism, spirituality too has travelled from East to West and has played a major role in human evolution in both civilizations.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Shariati, "Bazgasht beh khish."

<sup>335</sup> Shariati, "Tamadon chist?"

<sup>336</sup> Shariati, "Bahs-e kolli raje beh tamadon va farhang."

<sup>337</sup> Shariati, "Estekhray va tasfieh manabe farhangi."

<sup>338</sup> Ali Shariati, "Erfan, barabari, azadi" ("Spirituality, Equality, Freedom"), 1355/1976, C.W. 2, Ali Shariati: The Complete Collection of Works [CD ROM], Tehran: Shariati Cultural Foundation, 2010.

## The Civilizational Framework Revisited

### *BEYOND EAST-WEST AND CIVILIZATION?*

In recent decades, the East-West civilizational binary has been radically deconstructed by a range of Western and non-Western commentators. Edward Said's celebrated 1978 book, *Orientalism*, is perhaps the best known systematic deconstruction of this binary. In this book and elsewhere, Said presents a critical analysis of the European intellectual discipline of Orientalism and its function in the broader configuration of European colonialism in Muslim societies. According to Said, since its very beginning, European colonialism in Asia and Africa went hand in hand with the construction and advancement of an intellectual discourse (ultimately a discourse of power) that drew a continental/civilizational line between a powerful and superior Europe with its universal values and modes of thought, and a weak and defeated East that only became comprehensible when examined and articulated by Europe itself. In this particular civilizational construction, the West came to represent the standard of human evolution and progress, and the Orient its oppositional other.<sup>339</sup> In Said's view, the line which separated the Occident from the Orient in this newly manufactured civilizational discourse was less a fact of nature than of "human production" and "imaginative geography."<sup>340</sup>

Said believes that as categories of representation the Orient and the Occident inevitably perpetuate a kind of determinism that reduces multifaceted

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<sup>339</sup> Edward W. Said, "Orientalism," *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1977), 170.

<sup>340</sup> Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique*, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985), 90. Also see: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 259.

human dynamics to simplistic and fixed categories. His detailed analysis reveals how a wide range of European Orientalists framed not only their historiographies, but also their analyses of contemporary social and political challenges, in terms of an "East-West" civilizational binary.<sup>341</sup> Said's analysis radically questions the assumption of an enduring and unchanging view of an Oriental or an Occidental essence, type, or mentality, which in his view only undermines and distorts the heterogeneity, dynamism, and complexities of human realities. He shows how throughout nineteenth and twentieth centuries a range of European Orientalists advanced a view of an inherent "ontological difference between Eastern and Western" religious, social, and economic "mentalities."<sup>342</sup> While the Occidental mind was defined as being rational and entrepreneurial, the Oriental mind was regarded as being anti-modern and incapable of "economic rationality."<sup>343</sup> Moreover, in these productions the Occidental mind came to represent the maturity of human civilization and culture, and the Oriental mind its infancy. Thus, Said notes that Orientalism saw civilization as a "westwards [movement] away from Asia and towards Europe."<sup>344</sup>

In his critical analysis of Orientalism as a colonial discourse of power, Said makes a case for abandoning the categories of Orient and Occident and the civilizational framework in which they have been constructed.<sup>345</sup> The Orient and Occident, he believes, are products of a colonial geography which distort and suppress the plurality of lived experiences in diverse societies. Similarly, he

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<sup>341</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 270.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>344</sup> Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," 94.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 95.

argues that the very concept of Western civilization is essentially meaningless "except as ... an ideological fiction, implying a sort of detached superiority for a handful of values and ideas none of which has much meaning outside of the history of conquest, immigration, travel, and the mingling of peoples" that have shaped the diverse social formations and mixed identities of European societies.<sup>346</sup> It nevertheless appears that Said's analysis retains aspects of the civilizational framework that he himself persuasively deconstructs. As Fred Dallmayr has pointed out, throughout his study, Said juxtaposes and contrasts "the Orient as constructed by Orientalist discourses with something else elusively called the 'real Orient,' the 'true Orient,' or the 'Orient itself.'"<sup>347</sup> Said also makes many references to millennia-old cultural, material, and intellectual relations between the Orient and the Occident and describes the rise of European colonialism as the West's move "upon the East."<sup>348</sup> In a 1985 essay titled, "Orientalism Reconsidered," Said explains that his critique of the discourse of European Orientalism should not imply that "the division between Orient and Occident ... is simply fictional." Instead, he argues, his analysis seeks to demonstrate that both entities are produced by human-beings and in the context of the prevailing power relations, and thus, "must be studied as integral components of the social, and not the divine or natural, world."<sup>349</sup>

Additionally, Said's thought advances a critical position toward the re-appropriation of colonially constructed civilizational/national identities in the

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<sup>346</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 347.

<sup>347</sup> Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, xvi.

<sup>348</sup> Said, "Orientalism," 187.

<sup>349</sup> Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," 90.

course of anti-colonial struggles. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and elsewhere, Said makes a case that resistance to colonialism and imperialism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has given rise to ethnic nationalism and cultural nativism around the world. For Said, these identitarian tendencies have characterized a range of responses to colonialism, from the discourse of *négritude* in Africa to the call for return to a pre-colonial Islamic essence in Muslim societies.<sup>350</sup> He argues that Eurocentrism and nativism are binary forces that "feed off each other."<sup>351</sup> While the latter emerges in response to the former and its colonial consequences, it nevertheless accepts and assumes "the consequences of imperialism, the racial, religious, and political divisions imposed by imperialism itself."<sup>352</sup> Furthermore, Said's analysis reveals that in nativist re-appropriations of colonially mitigated units of identity, the West, as a monolithic category, forever remains the singular reference point, the interlocutor, in the negotiation of local identity, in identifying and analyzing historical and ongoing challenges, and in outlining future prospects and possibilities. Though he is critical of this hostile fixation or *ressentiment* toward the West and of the nativist reproductions of colonial binaries in much of post-colonial thought (including in the discourses of Senghor, Al-e Ahmad, and others), Said nevertheless remains more optimistic about the more "imaginative" liberation discourses of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon and their call for a new soul and a new humanity.<sup>353</sup> He argues that in today's world it is possible to negotiate "a more generous and

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<sup>350</sup> See: Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xxiv; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 337-8.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., xxiv.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 242, 307.

pluralistic vision of the world," while acknowledging the existing polarities and asymmetries of power. Drawing on Fanon, Said calls for "a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness."<sup>354</sup>

Said is certainly not alone in calling for a departure from the categories of civilization and civilizational analysis. Critics have pointed out that in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century European imperialism in Africa and Asia the discourse of civilization was used to facilitate and justify imperial violence and expansionism.<sup>355</sup> Critics have also drawn attention to a close link between the discourse of civilization and the values of Enlightenment modernity.<sup>356</sup> For commentators such as Indian historian Prasenjit Duara, in post-Enlightenment European thought civilization came to represent not simply a category for differentiation between distinct formations of value systems and sociopolitical and socioeconomic structures, but instead a signifier to distinguish the self from the other through the juxtaposition of different, and sometimes clashing, communities of values.<sup>357</sup> According to Duara, in modern Europe "civilization" was used as a category "to identify a transnational group of Enlightened civilized

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<sup>354</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 230.

<sup>355</sup> See: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "From Civilization to Globalization: The 'West' as a Shifting Signifier in Indian Modernity," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2012): 138-152; Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For broader contemporary discussions and contemporary perspectives on the categories of civilization and civilizational analysis see: Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Said Arjomand and Edward A. Tiryakian, ed., *Rethinking Civilizational Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2004); Harry Redner, *Beyond Civilization: Society, Culture, and the Individual in the Age of Globalization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2013); Peter Baofu, *Beyond Civilization to Post-Civilization: Conceiving a Better Model of Life Settlement to Supersede Civilization* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>356</sup> See: Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 38; Prasenjit Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization and Decolonization," *Journal of World History* 15, no. 1 (March 2004), 2.

<sup>357</sup> Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization," 1.

nations in opposition to their colonies. The latter were seen as lacking civilization -- in the sense of Enlightenment values -- and hence, not worthy of sovereignty."<sup>358</sup> But Duara also identifies an alternative notion of civilization which emerged in the colonized world and which challenged the Eurocentric conception of the category. According to him, the new conception, formulated in the twentieth century and in the aftermath of the disillusionment with the civilizational claims of European modernity, defined civilization in terms of cultural and historical particularities and differences. While the "civilizational discourse" of European imperialism advanced a singular vision of a universal civilization, a range of non-European thinkers including Okakura Tenshin (Kakuzo) in Japan, Gu Hongming and Liang Qichao in China, and Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi in India advocated the idea of "multiple civilizations." Nevertheless, Duara ultimately argues that even though the twentieth century non-Western conceptualization of civilization served an "emancipatory" function in the course of anti-colonial struggles, in the post-colonial period it also gave birth to militant forms of nationalism and identitarianism.<sup>359</sup>

Also pointing to the colonial construction and the imperial operations of the civilizational framework, Iranian-American cultural critic Hamid Dabashi has called for abandoning the language of civilization altogether. Expanding on Said's analysis, Dabashi argues that the non-West and particularly the Orient served an important role in the construction of the category of Western civilization. In "For

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<sup>358</sup> Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization," 3.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 3.



the Last Time: Civilizations" (2001), Dabashi argues that European Orientalism "concocted" the categories of Islamic, Indian, and Chinese civilizations as the Oriental others of the Occidental self and as the "civilizational mirrors" of a superior West.<sup>360</sup> Defined in juxtaposition with the modern West, these civilizational categories were invented "to raise the Western Civilization as the normative achievement of world history and lower all other as its abnormal antecedents."<sup>361</sup> In Dabashi's view, in the context of the "emerging globality" of capitalist modernity in the present context such a "metaphoric division of the world into civilizational boundaries and center and periphery no longer are valid."<sup>362</sup> Not only civilizational boundaries, but also the boundaries and the very legitimacy of the modern nation-state are now in question. According to Dabashi,

At the threshold of the 21st century, the selfsame capital has evolved in the global logic of its operation and the unitary basis of national economies no longer can serve as the currency of its operation. The circular spiral of capital and labor has now so ferociously destroyed the artificial national boundaries of its own making not more than 200 years ago that it is no longer possible for any claim to national economy to have a legitimate claim on operation. The result is the aggressive acculturation of individuals from their national economies and national cultures, as they are being thrown into an entirely new configuration of capital and its culture.<sup>363</sup>

The appropriate response to this condition, for Dabashi, is not to resort to constructed and colonially imposed identities or to attempt to re-appropriate the civilizational discourse from its colonial end. Instead, what we need is to

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<sup>360</sup> Hamid Dabashi, "For the Last Time: Civilizations," *International Sociology* 16, no. 3 (September 2001), 135-136.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 142.

understand "the universal operation of capital" and the "corresponding culture" that it creates.<sup>364</sup>

Problematizing the reproduction of modern civilizational binaries by a range of contemporary Muslim thinkers, Dabashi describes "Islamic civilization" as a colonial production which, like other civilizational categories, has been debased with the decentralization of capital. According to Dabashi, prior to the expansion of capitalist modernity in the Middle East and North Africa, "what we know of Islam as an historical practice is the simultaneous polyvocality of its discourse, polylocality of its geographical manifestations, and the polyfocality of its visions." In the course of the expansion of capitalist modernity, and as the intellectual arm of European colonialism, "Orientalism successfully suppressed [Islam's] cacophonous configuration and collectively theorized it as one particularly poignant civilizational other of 'The West.'"<sup>365</sup> Today, however, we can no longer speak of the Islamic civilization because the very categories of the West and Western civilization against which other civilizational categories were constructed have lost their meaning within the current configuration of global power relations. Thus, in *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (2008), Dabashi writes, "Islam can no longer speak. It has no particular interlocutor. Its once 'Western,' interlocutor has now imploded, vaporized into the thin air of globalization. The world has no center, no periphery. In the absence of a civilizational other, Islam has become mute."<sup>366</sup> In Dabashi' view, contemporary

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<sup>364</sup> Dabashi, "For the Last Time," 143.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>366</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 111.

Muslim thinkers must abandon "any intellectual engagement with Islam that is conversant with the very centrality of the notion of 'Europe,' or more specifically with the European colonial modernity,"<sup>367</sup> and re-discover what he calls Islam's "cosmopolitan worldliness."<sup>368</sup>

In a number of his works, Dabashi examines the limitations and capacities of the discourses of a number of Muslim thinkers including Ali Shariati for contributing to the revival of Islam's "cosmopolitan worldliness" in the twenty first century. For Dabashi, Shariati's life and intellectual productions are reflective of a constant effort to transcend the nativist and identitarian traps that characterized the discourses of many other Muslim thinkers and activists during the twentieth century and continue to do so today. Pointing to Shariati's active solidarity with Cuban and Algerian revolutionaries, his interest in Latin American Catholic liberation theology movement, and his correspondence with Frantz Fanon about the conditions for advancing anti-colonial struggles in Iran and Algeria, Dabashi argues that in his "critical and creative conversation" with a diverse range of global emancipatory discourses, Shariati abandoned "nativism, regionalism, and tribalism" in favor of "a globality of learning and action."<sup>369</sup> By combining his strong Shi'i faith with socialism and "Sartrean existentialism," Shariati navigated "the topography of a liberation theology beyond any particular domain or denomination."<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 100.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>370</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 201.

In *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire*, Dabashi draws parallels between Shariati and another prominent twentieth century Muslim revolutionary thinker and activist, American civil rights leader Malcolm X. According to Dabashi, though they belonged to two different contexts, the Islamic liberation theologies of both Malcolm X and Shariati cultivated "cosmopolitan and transnational solidarities" which transcended the "outdated, divisive, and disabling East-West axis."<sup>371</sup> Furthermore, in the liberation discourses of these two Muslim revolutionaries Dabashi finds commonalities with the emancipatory discourses of two other leading mid-twentieth century revolutionary thinkers and activists, Frantz Fanon, and Ernesto Che Guevara. In *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror* (2009), Dabashi argues that despite their differences, the common denominator that connects the ideas of these exemplary twentieth century revolutionaries is "a universalized parlance subsuming the particulars of their revolutionary message."<sup>372</sup> According to Dabashi, the "defiant hybridity and cultural inauthenticity" of Shariati, Malcolm X, Fanon, and Guevara "expose the colonial manufacturing of civilizational divides and cultural authenticity ... while at the very same time they dismantle the compradorial function of the Oriental regiment of the neocons ... by suspending their claim to cultural representation."<sup>373</sup> Nevertheless, in his final analysis Dabashi believes that in comparison with the radically transnational and transracial orientation of Malcolm X's thought after his post-pilgrimage transformation, Shariati's discourse seems to get somewhat bogged down by a "delusional configuration called 'the

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<sup>371</sup> Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 115.

<sup>372</sup> Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism*, 201.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

West."<sup>374</sup> He argues that while Malcolm X's "unfinished" liberation theology found a truly "cosmopolitan disposition" after his 1964 pilgrimage, Shariati's revolutionary anti-colonialism was "incarcerated, normatively severed, and framed - held tightly in pigeonholes like 'Iran,' 'the Middle East,' or even 'Islam.'"<sup>375</sup> In his view, for Shariati's revolutionary discourse to achieve its cosmopolitan potential it must avoid the trap of incarceration within the colonially manufactured and no-longer-applicable civilizational categories and binaries. A genuine conversation between diverse modes of resistance against "globalized tyranny," Dabashi argues, requires "visualizing the normative emergence of a new geography of liberation that can no longer be bogged down on a debilitating East-West axis or framed and incarcerated within specific nation-states that have hitherto distorted the far more global potentials of such revolutionary Muslim liberation activists as Ali Shariati or Malcolm X."<sup>376</sup>

#### *BEYOND ORIENTALISM?*

In their critical analyses of the Eurocentric/colonial conceptions of the East-West binary and its nativist re-appropriations from the colonial end, both Said and Dabashi call for the abandonment of the civilizational discourse. There are, however, a number of other commentators who seek to advance a similar critique of Eurocentrism and nativism without fully rejecting the category of civilization and the East-West analytical framework. Among others, prominent American political theorist, Fred Dallmayr, has, in numerous books and essays over the last two decades presented an alternative account of the civilizational framework that

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<sup>374</sup> Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 99.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 114.

in some ways finds common ground with Shariati's search for civilizational diversity. Though he draws on Said's deconstruction of the colonial discourse of Orientalism, Dallmayr nevertheless seeks to explore the possibilities and conditions of cross-cultural encounters "beyond Eurocentric arrogance and ... 'beyond Orientalism'."<sup>377</sup> As a political theorist who sees himself as being firmly grounded in the Western intellectual tradition, Dallmayr attempts to identify and revive the dialogical capacities of Western political and philosophical thought in order to make a case as well as a theoretical space for engaging in genuine dialogue with non-Western traditions of political thought and philosophy.<sup>378</sup>

Dallmayr acknowledges that historically the discourse of civilization has served as a discourse of power in the context of the expansion of European colonialism. He argues that "the claim of civilizational benevolence ('white man's burden') backed up by the asserted need to control backward peoples" has served as the primary justification offered in support of empires both historically and in the contemporary period.<sup>379</sup> For Dallmayr, the civilizational discourse of colonialism represents a hegemonic universalism that is inherently opposed to the universal values of diversity and heterogeneity. This homogenizing tendency of hegemonic universalism, he argues, has informed the way in which the West has approached the non-West at least since the sixteenth century Spanish colonialism in the Americas. According to Dallmayr, in the context of colonial expansionism in Americas, Asia, Africa, and Australasia, "Europe or the West has tended to

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<sup>377</sup> Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1996), xi.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., iv-xix.

<sup>379</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Empire or Cosmopolis? Civilization at the Crossroads," *Globalizations* 2, no. 1 (2005), 14.

approach other cultures from a superior intellectual and political vantage point, that is from the perspective of a master spectator able to construct a model of the other best suited to purposes of domination and domestication."<sup>380</sup> In the post-colonial context, Dallmayr argues, Western economic and military hegemony and asymmetrical relations between the West and the non-West have persisted, albeit in "subtler forms."<sup>381</sup> In this context, he believes, the dominant discourses of civilization, universalism, and globalization have served only as smokescreens "for neocolonial forms of domination."<sup>382</sup>

While Dallmayr is attentive to the new global configuration of power and the decentralization of capitalism in the context of the globalization of markets, technology, and communication, he does not believe that the present condition has meant the end of the West or other civilizational categories. For Dallmayr, the "steady advance of globalization" in the post WWII context along with "the internal self-questioning or self-decentering of European or Western thought," which is particularly evident in contemporary Continental philosophy and its turn toward "difference" or "otherness," have contributed to the formation of a global discursive space that makes possible a different type of engagement between the West and the non-West.<sup>383</sup> According to him, the present global context is increasingly shaped by the rise of two opposing forces or tendencies. On the one hand, he argues, there is a push to move toward "empire" and "world dictatorship," while on the other hand there is an ongoing fight to keep alive the

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<sup>380</sup> Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, xv.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., ix.

hope of "global cooperation" and "an interdependent community of peoples (which can loosely be called 'cosmopolis')." <sup>384</sup> The former tendency is manifested today in the forceful expansion of the "pax-Americana" empire and neoliberal economics which are inherently homogenizing and anti-democratic, while the latter tendency is captured by discourses that call for preserving the innate hybridity of the global arena. <sup>385</sup> Dallmayr believes that cultivating genuine cosmopolitanism requires moving beyond the Western-centric and civilizational/cultural arrogance that has largely informed the interactions between the West and the non-West for roughly five centuries. Moreover, he maintains that true cosmopolitanism is achieved not through "tightly unified or blandly homogeneous cosmopolis," but instead through some form of global interdependence "nurtured by local and regional centers of political agency." <sup>386</sup>

In making a case for a new kind of encounter between the West and the non-West, Dallmayr advances two distinct, yet interrelated, lines of argumentation. On the one hand, he believes that the rejection of homogenizing universalism should not imply the assumption of "an 'essential' or unbridgeable difference between West and non-West." For him, to assume an "essential" division between these entities is not only inaccurate in the current context of globalization, but also "equally misguided when applied to earlier periods." While cultural diversity is an integral component of our human society, cultural/normative differences are not representations of antithetical essences, but rather the product of historical/contextual particularities. Nevertheless, he argues,

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<sup>384</sup> Dallmayr, "Empire or Cosmopolis?," 15.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 14-16.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 14.



the formation of all human cultures involves "a certain measure of cross-cultural learning." On the other hand, however, Dallmayr insists that "the denial of essential or invariant differences between cultures does not amount to an endorsement of essential sameness or non-distinction." In other words, for Dallmayr, the critique of essentialism should not lead to the re-production of homogenizing universalism and unilinear and Western-centric visions of the past, present, and future of humanity. In Dallmayr's view, the "ideology of sameness," articulated in such discourses as Francis Fukuyama's end of history thesis, "flies in the face of diverse historical-cultural trajectories and also of profound asymmetries in the distribution of global wealth and power."<sup>387</sup>

Dallmayr argues that the only viable alternative to both hegemonic universalism and cultural/civilizational essentialism is to move toward a dialogical ethos of mutual recognition, which in his view is the true manifestation of the innate diversity and plurality of human cultures and civilizations. In making a case for civilizational dialogue and dialogical cross-cultural encounters, Dallmayr draws on the ideas of German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), whose work, Dallmayr argues, has "shunned the telos of consensual convergence in favor of a nonassimilative stance of 'letting-be.'"<sup>388</sup> For Gadamer, the idea of "human solidarity" is not realized through "global uniformity" but instead, through "unity in diversity." According to Gadamer, "We must learn to appreciate and tolerate pluralities, multiplicities, cultural differences. The hegemony or unchallenged power of any single nation ... is dangerous for

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<sup>387</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Introduction: Toward a Comparative Political Theory," *The Review of Politics* 59, no. 3, Non-Western Political Thought (Summer, 1997), 423.

<sup>388</sup> Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, xii.

humanity. ... Every culture, every people has something distinctive to offer for the solidarity and welfare of humanity."<sup>389</sup> Building on Gadamer's discourse of civilizational dialogue, Dallmayr's work has problematized the singular conception of a world civilization, and particularly the Eurocentric notion that Western civilization represents the standard of civility. Thus, in a number of his works, including *Dialogue among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (2002), Dallmayr has made a case for a "civilizational dialogue" that gives recognition to the inherent dignity of the other. According to Dallmayr, "If civilization is a frame of significance allowing members to articulate their self-understanding, then civilizational dialogue must be properly 'civilized' by considering participants in their intrinsic worth."<sup>390</sup> While highlighting the emancipatory capacities of this Gadamerian dialogical framework, Dallmayr's analysis is nevertheless attentive to the hegemonic and exploitative power relations that pose a challenge to the ideal of dialogue. He argues that the advocacy of "dialogue and hermeneutical interrogation" would be incomplete without a close attention to "political and economic asymmetries shaping the respective status of West and non-West, of Northern and Southern hemispheres, and of 'developed' and 'developing' societies."<sup>391</sup>

For Dallmayr, the emerging discipline of comparative political theory has the potential to serve as one of the intellectual sites of the Gadamerian ideal of

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<sup>389</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer quoted in Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, xiii. See: Thomas Pantham, "Some Dimensions of the Universality of Philosophical Hermeneutics: A Conversation with Hans-Gerog Gadamer," *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 9 (1992), 132.

<sup>390</sup> Fred Dallmayr, *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 67. Also see: Fred Dallmayr, "Globalization and Inequality: A Plea for Cosmopolitan Justice," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 1 (2006), 63.

<sup>391</sup> Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, xvii.

civilizational dialogue. In a number of his writings Dallmayr has called on the students of political theory and political philosophy in the Western academy to expand their scope of learning and analysis beyond the "routinized canons" and to attend "to global, cross-cultural (or 'comparative') political theorizing."<sup>392</sup> For Dallmayr, the aim of comparative political theory must be "to move toward a more genuine universalism, and beyond the spurious 'universality' traditionally claimed by the Western canon."<sup>393</sup> He argues that in their interaction with the non-West, Western scholars can move beyond the arrogance of Eurocentrism and old-fashioned Orientalism by committing to the ideal of dialogical interaction and relinquishing the role of "a global overseer or universal spectator whose task consists basically in assessing the relative proximity or nonproximity of given societies to the established global yardstick." This alternative framework allows both Western and non-Western scholars to acknowledge the inherent dignity of the other and to engage in cross-cultural learning as equal "co-participants."<sup>394</sup>

Dallmayr's call for dialogue and the recognition of difference is shared by a range of other contemporary commentators. In a 2002 book, titled *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilization*, Jonathan Sacks, whom Dallmayr quotes frequently in a number of his works, makes a case for sustained dialogue among members of all faiths in order to cultivate mutual respect and to avoid a civilizational clash. Sacks, who is also the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Britain and the Commonwealth, argues that genuine

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<sup>392</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 2 (June 2004), 249.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>394</sup> Dallmayr, "Introduction," 422.

coexistence of diverse human societies requires something beyond the formalism of "rights" or even "mere tolerance." Instead, he believes, what is needed is the recognition that "just as the natural environment depends on biodiversity, so the human environment depends on cultural diversity, because no one civilization encompasses all the spiritual, ethical and artistic expressions of mankind."<sup>395</sup> Borrowing Sacks' concept of "dignity of difference," Mojtaba Mahdavi and W. Andy Knight also make a case for civilizational dialogue as an alternative to discourses that view diversity and difference as a challenge and a source of unending tension and conflict. Initially in an essay titled "On the 'Dignity of Difference': Neither the 'End of History' nor the 'Clash of Civilizations'" (2008) and later in an edited volume, titled *Towards the Dignity of Difference?: Neither 'End of History' nor 'Clash of Civilizations'* (2012), Mahdavi and Knight deconstruct the hegemonic discourses of end of history and clash of civilizations, which they see as the most prominent and influential contemporary articulations of a Western-centric vision in which the West is the superior civilization and the singular representation of the universal values of modernity, progress, and civility. Drawing on the contributions of a wide range of Western and non-Western commentators, Mahdavi and Knight make a case for abandoning the paradigms of global convergence on the one hand, and clash on the other, and for embracing the ideal of "dialogue."<sup>396</sup> According to Mahdavi and Knight, the "West versus Rest" binary which features prominently in the analyses of

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<sup>395</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 62.

<sup>396</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi and Andy Knight, "On the 'Dignity of Difference': Neither the 'End of History' nor the 'Clash of Civilizations,'" *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict*, (Winter 2008), 35.

commentators such as Fukuyama and Huntington is rooted in an imaginary inherited from early sixteenth-century European colonialism. In this colonial imaginary, they argue, the "West" came to represent the universal standard of human civilization, and the "non-West" as its opposite.<sup>397</sup> For Mahdavi and Knight, then, the discourses of Fukuyama and Huntington re-produce the two key features of the colonial West-Rest divide: both discourses assume the premise of Western civilizational supremacy, and both assume the inherent incompatibility of Western civilization with other (in their view inferior) civilizations.

In critiquing the Western-centric civilizational framework in which Huntington and Fukuyama advance their accounts, Mahdavi and Knight reject the essentialist constructions of diverse human cultures and argue for the negotiation of a third way between the extremes of universalism and particularism by presenting an alternative conception of the civilizational discourse on the basis of "self-respect and respect for the others."<sup>398</sup> In their view, we live in a world of "irreducible" cultural/civilizational diversity, and it is possible "to frame the issue of self/other in a manner that is representative of humanity as a whole rather than of those bent on some paternalistic civilizing mission." Furthermore, Mahdavi and Knight argue that in a world shaped by the reality of existing cultural pluralism and hybridity the categories of "Western" or "Islamic" civilization do not exist in any "coherent" way.<sup>399</sup> Civilizations, they argue, "are not static and impermeable." Instead, they are "malleable forms of collective consciousness

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<sup>397</sup> Mahdavi and Knight, "On the 'Dignity of Difference'," 27.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>399</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi and Andy Knight, "Preface," in *Towards the Dignity of Difference?: Neither End of History Nor Clash of Civilizations*, ed. Mojtaba Mahdavi and W. Andy Knight (London, UK: Ashgate, 2012), xxiii.

always in a state of flux and evolution."<sup>400</sup> No civilization is a "shut-down, sealed-off" unit and no civilizational analysis can be inattentive to the internal dynamism and pluralism of distinct civilizational categories.<sup>401</sup> For Mahdavi and Knight, then, civilizational categories, Western or otherwise, do not exist in any monolithic or unitary way. Thus, they assert that there is "no single West" and that the category of "Western civilization" has historically been, and continues to be "an amalgam of liberalism and fascism, democracy and dictatorship, development and underdevelopment, equality and inequality, and emancipation and racism."<sup>402</sup> Similarly, they argue, "there is no single Rest," and that all non-Western civilizations (African, Confucian/Asian, Islamic, etc.) are themselves a combination of "differences and contradictions."<sup>403</sup>

While they problematize the essentialist and monolithic construction of civilizational categories and binaries in the Western-centric discourses of Fukuyama and Huntington, Mahdavi and Knight nevertheless see "civilizational differences" as a reality in our contemporary world. However, like Dallmayr, rather than seeing difference and diversity as a source of tension and clash, they see it as an opportunity to cultivate a global cosmopolitan consciousness. Mahdavi and Knight point out that historically different civilizations "have contributed to the development of each other." In particular, they draw attention to some of the ways in which the "Islamic civilization" and the scholarship of the

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<sup>400</sup> Mahdavi and Knight, "Preface," xxiv.

<sup>401</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi and Andy Knight, "Introduction," in *Towards the Dignity of Difference?: Neither End of History Nor Clash of Civilizations*, ed. Mojtaba Mahdavi and W. Andy Knight (London, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 5.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 6.

likes of Al-Kindi, Al-Razi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd contributed to the rise of "modern Western civilization."<sup>404</sup> Furthermore, Mahdavi and Knight challenge what they see as "the dominant tendency of seeing the future as a globalizing merger of all civilizations into one" by drawing attention to the possibility of "the compatibility among different values through dialogue and among coexisting cultures in a plural world."<sup>405</sup> Drawing on Shariati's view about the emancipatory potential of re-visiting and re-structuring cultural/civilizational resources, Mahdavi and Knight argue that the ideal of recognition of difference requires that every culture enters "in critical dialogue with its own traditions," and articulates the shared/universal values of a common humanity (i.e. freedom, equality, justice, democracy) "in a local language that can be implemented through local/homegrown institutions."<sup>406</sup>

### **Neo-Shariatis and the Civilizational Framework**

As the previous chapters argued, neo-Shariatis reject the reading of Shariati's thought as a nativist discourse of Occidentalism. In revisiting Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity neo-Shariatis draw attention, on the one hand, to Shariati's rejection of homogenizing universalism which sees Western modernity as the universal standard of human civilization, and, on the other hand, to his critique of identitarian discourses which call for a total rejection of modernity and the revival of an authentic cultural and civilizational past. It may be argued that in their revisiting of Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity neo-

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<sup>404</sup> Mahdavi and Knight, "Introduction," 8.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 14.

Shariatis have read his civilizational discourse as an effort to transcend the dichotomous discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism, and as an intellectual endeavour along the lines of the Gadamerian/Dallmayrian discourse of civilizational dialogue. In this reading, Shariati's civilizational discourse is seen not only as a call for the recognition of difference, but also as an invitation for dialogue and cooperative coexistence.

While neo-Shariatis acknowledge that the categories of East and West occupy a central place in Shariati's thought, they do not believe that Shariati sees these categories as binary opposites or as the representations of two fixed and clashing essences. Among others, Sara Shariati argues that though Shariati appeals to the East-West binary in order to highlight the contextual particularities of Iranian society and the inadequacy of the Eurocentric frameworks of analysis, he nevertheless seeks to go beyond the essentialist construction of the two categories in European Orientalism and in the non-Western discourses of Orientalism in reverse. She draws parallels between Shariati's treatment of East and West and the efforts of a range of twentieth century Western scholars of Islamic thought including, Louis Massignon (1883-1962), Henry Corbin (1903-1978), Henri Laoust (1905-1983), William Montgomery Watt (1909-2006), Jacques Berque (1910-1995), and Maxime Rodinson (1915-2004) who emphasized the existence of historical and ongoing connections and interactions between the eastern and the western sides of the Mediterranean region and rejected the view of East and West as essentially dissimilar civilizational categories characterized by irreconcilable differences. According to Sara Shariati,



Shariati does not deny that East and West represent certain historical, social, and political particularities. Nevertheless, she maintains, he is convinced that the realization of the promise of a new humanity and a new civilization necessitates a simultaneous reclaiming of East and West and the unveiling of their historical co-constitution and their mutual influences on one another.<sup>407</sup>

Similarly, Ehsan Shariati believes that while Shariati's thought is attentive to the particularities of the historical formations of East and West, it does not accept the essentialist and deterministic conceptions of the two categories and the claim that we are bound to accept the inevitability of Western supremacy and Eastern inferiority.<sup>408</sup> He argues that in his approach, Shariati seeks to negotiate a third way between an uncritical embrace of the East in the name of local religious/cultural traditions (i.e. fundamentalism), and a blind embrace of the West in the name of modernity, progress, and civilization (i.e. Westerncentrism).<sup>409</sup> In his view, Shariati's emphasis on dialogue and synthesis distinguishes his civilizational discourse from Western-centric discourses that see the modern West as the final and the universal form of human civilization, as well as from culturalist discourses that envision civilizational irreconcilability and clash.<sup>410</sup> Arguing along the same lines, Susan Shariati too holds that Shariati accepts the premise of a civilizational divide between East and West without believing that either entity constitutes a monolithic whole. For Shariati, she

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<sup>407</sup> Sara Shariati, interview by author (telephone), 28 November 2012.

<sup>408</sup> "Mizgerd-e dovom nashrieh nasim-e bidaari dar bar-rasi shenaakht shakhsiat Shariati," ("Nasim-e Bidari's Second Panel on Examining Shariati's Character"), Ali Shariati Information Center (no date), <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=213> (accessed 11 December 2012).

<sup>409</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab, no date (unpublished).

<sup>410</sup> See: Ehsan Shariati, "Fardid forsāt-e filsoof boodan ra az dast dad" ("Fardid Lost the Chance to be a Philosopher"), Rahnameh (no date), <http://ehsanshariati.org/show/?id=90> (accessed 4 April 2013).

argues, East and West are neither polar opposites nor reducible to any singular and predetermined historical process or fixed cultural essence.<sup>411</sup> She maintains that by rejecting the essentialist construction of the East-West binary, "Shariati seeks to avoid a deterministic view of civilizational difference and to provide a dialogical space for mutual engagement and exchange."<sup>412</sup> Susan Shariati also points out that for Shariati the prerequisite for such a dialogue is to radically critique both "Westernism" and "Easternism."<sup>413</sup> In her reading, rather than embracing one and rejecting the other Shariati sees himself as standing between East and West and "refusing the binary choice."<sup>414</sup> Quoting Shariati that "to be a human is to be in a state of suspense between one's own East and West," she argues that for Shariati more than representing two separate geographical entities, East and West represent two "unfinished projects" and "existential orientations" that complement one another.<sup>415</sup>

Among other leading neo-Shariati figures, Reza Alijani also holds that Shariati attempts to demystify the monolithic and essentialist conceptions of the categories of East and West. In *Shariati and the West (shariati va gharb)*, he argues that in a context where modernity was often associated exclusively with the experiences of the modern West, Shariati sought to advance a simultaneous critique of both "Westerncentism" and "anti-Westernism" and to negotiate a

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<sup>411</sup> Susan Shariati, "Moghadameh: tafakor dar taghato" ("Introduction: Thinking at Crossroads"), in Faramarz Motamed-Dezfooli, *Kavir: tajrobeh moderniteh irani: tafsir va bazkhani kavir doktor ali shariati (The Desert: The Experience of Iranian Modernity: Revisiting and Reinterpreting Dr. Ali Shariati's The Desert)* (Tehran: Ghalam, 1387), 13.

<sup>412</sup> Susan Shariati, "Dar mian-e do-gaaneh-haay-e teraajik: shariati olgoo ya ravesheh" ("Between Tragic Binaries: Shariati, Model and Method"), *Shargh*, 29 Khordad 1386/19 June 2007, <http://drshariati.org/show/?id=36> (accessed 13 April 2011).

<sup>413</sup> Susan Shariati, "Moghadameh," 13.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>415</sup> Ali Shariati, quote in Susan Shariati, "Moghadameh," 12.

principled and sustainable approach toward both modernity and the West.<sup>416</sup> According to Alijani, Shariati distinguishes between "two faces" of the modern West. On the one hand, he argues, for Shariati the West represents a destructive and violent system of "global colonialism and economic imperialism," which obliterates diverse world cultures and imposes its own standards of cultural and material production and consumption. On the other hand, Alijani contends, Shariati sees the modern West as a manifestation of a universal human civilization, albeit within a particular historical, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic context. In his view, even though Shariati is critical of the West's colonial face he also problematizes the wholesale rejection of the modern Western cultural and civilizational experiences.<sup>417</sup> Thus, Alijani argues, for Shariati Western civilization is heir to the legacies of all the previous civilizations including those in the East. He also notes that Shariati acknowledges the major role of colonialism in shaping the contemporary relations between the East and the West. At the same time, Alijani argues that Shariati refuses to see colonialism as the only determining factor and believes that the historical decline of the East had already provided the conditions for the advancement of European colonialism in Asia and Northern Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>418</sup>

In their intellectual productions, prominent neo-Shariatis continue to see the project of indigenous modernity, defined as a modern restructuring of local cultural/civilizational resources, as a third way between the extremes of

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<sup>416</sup> Reza Alijani, *Shariat va gharb (Shariati and the West)* (Tehran: Ghalam, 1388/2009), 7.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 10-15.

<sup>418</sup> Reza Alijani, interview by author (Internet/Skype), 20 November 2012. Also see: Alijani, *Shariat va gharb*, 49-57.

modernism and traditionalism, Eurocentrism and nativism, and universalism and particularism. For Ehsan Shariati, in the present context wherein various aspects of Western modernity have been globalized and have permeated into all local and distinct cultures sustainable and progressive social, political, and cultural change in the Iranian context requires simultaneous attention to both progressive and oppressive aspects of Western modernity and local cultural/religious traditions. While he believes that there exist differences in worldviews (*Weltanschauung*) between Western and non-Western thought, he nevertheless insists that common human challenges, from environmental issues to the question of the alienation of the modern individual, are universal concerns that require cooperation and engagement beyond national and cultural boundaries.<sup>419</sup> For Sara Shariati too, defining the relationship between the global and local sources of identity and subjecting both to radical critique represents an urgent task in the contemporary Iranian society. In her view, the acceleration of the globalization of capital and technology in recent decades has resulted in a crisis of traditional forms of local identities, which has, in turn, given rise to modern identitarian movements. Thus, she argues, globalization/homogenization and fragmentation/tribalization represent the two dominant orientations of the modern world. The former, she believes, is represented normatively by such discourses as Fukuyama's end of history thesis, and the latter by Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis.<sup>420</sup> Like

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<sup>419</sup> Ehsan Shariati, interview by Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab, no date (unpublished).

<sup>420</sup> Sara Shariati, "Chehreh jahani-gar, chehreh jahani-zadeh: siyasat jahani kardan va ravand tarikhi jahani shodan" ("The Globalizer Face and the Globalized Face: An Evaluation of Globalizing Policies and the Process of Globalization"), in *Khodkavi-e melli dar asr-e jahani shodan (National Self-Examination in the Age of Globalization)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Ghasidehsara, 1381/2002), 147-8.

Shariati, Sara Shariati calls for the recognition of civilizational pluralism as a third way between Eurocentrism and nativism and advocates advancing a project of indigenous modernity as the basis of a modern restructuring of local traditions in light of the universal values of the modern age (human autonomy, democracy, rights, freedom, equality, etc.). She rejects the view of a singular and uniform global civilization and argues instead that "each civilization, through various historical periods, has experienced both ascendancy and decline, each civilization has its own particular rationality ..., and each civilization simultaneously contains both local and global elements."<sup>421</sup> In her view, responding to the post-colonial calls of Fanon and Shariati for developing an alternative to Europe and the United States in the Third World remains a pressing task for intellectuals and activists in non-Western societies. She argues that advancing this project requires, on the one hand, attending to the universal values and the global concerns of a common humanity, and on the other hand, giving recognition to and critically engaging with the cultural/civilizational particularities of each society.<sup>422</sup>

Like Sara Shariati, Hossein Mesbahian sees the "crisis" of identity and of its local and global sources as a major question in contemporary Iranian society, and like her, he makes a case for a radical restructuring of the sources of the Iranian identity on the basis of simultaneous attention to the universal and the particular. In a fashion typical of Shariati's other contemporary followers, Mesbahian too seeks to advance his discourse of indigenous modernity through a simultaneous critique of homogenizing universalism and cultural essentialism.

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<sup>421</sup> Sara Shariati, "Chehreh jahani-gar," 168.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 170-4.

While he advocates the recognition of cultural/civilizational particularity and difference, he nevertheless believes that without a "universalist" vantage point "particularism" only serves "to undermine the broader demand for equality and becomes a form of self-imposed segregation limiting the local culture's prospects for reinvention and eventually leading to its demise."<sup>423</sup> He also charges particularist approaches to cultural identity with failing to adequately address and understand the ways in which relations of domination and exploitation have shaped our contemporary world and understandings. At the same time, however, Mesbahian argues that taken to its extreme, universalism becomes a form of forceful homogenization of the world. The latter, he argues, only reinforces those relations of domination and exploitation that European colonialism initially introduced. Thus, in his view, a project of indigenous modernity (such as the one advanced by Gandhi in the context of resistance against colonialism in India) is simultaneously a radical critique of essentialism and nativism, and a call for the recognition of difference. For Mesbahian, while difference is informed by the distinct modes of civilizational and cultural particularity, the recognition of difference (by others) requires articulating particularity and difference in universally negotiated terms.<sup>424</sup>

While the neo-Shariati discourse is undoubtedly heir to Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity (with all of its liberating, as well as limiting theoretical potentials), in a number of ways some neo-Shariati figures

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<sup>423</sup> Hossein (Mesbahian) Rahyab, "Maahiat, mavaane' va emkaanaat-e no-saazi-e haviat-e irani" (Nature, Possibilities and Challenges of the Restructuring of Iranian Identity) in *Khodkavi-e melli dar asr-e jahani shodan (National Self-Examination in the Age of Globalization)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Ghasidehsara, 1381/2002), 7.

<sup>424</sup> Hossein Mesbahian, interview by author (Internet/Oovoo), 23 April 2013.

may be argued to have gone beyond Shariati's discourse. As the previous chapter pointed out, while neo-Shariatis continue to stress Shariati's call to return to the sources of the Iranian-Islamic self they nevertheless believe that the projects of Afghani, Iqbal, and Shariati must be critically re-visited in light of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran, and other Muslim societies, in the latter half of the twentieth century. Additionally, pointing to the failure of mid-twentieth century Third Worldist discourses in various parts of Asia and Africa neo-Shariatis draw attention to the oppressive social and political consequences of nativist articulations of post-coloniality. Neo-Shariati figures such as Sara Shariati and Reza Alijani also point out that the acceleration of the processes of globalization in recent decades has subjected the global configuration of power to important changes. Noting that Shariati developed his discourse in a context where the East-West binary was widely used by various commentators, they suggest that the framework may no longer provide an accurate picture of the prevailing global power asymmetries in today's world. Sara Shariati, for example, believes that although in his own era Shariati sought to critically re-conceptualize the binary and establish a new relationship between the categories of East and West, the realities of the modern world necessitate moving beyond the framework and questioning not only the dichotomous construction of East and West, but also the very category of civilization. She acknowledges that while for Shariati and many other mid-twentieth century intellectuals the categories of East and West served as the symbolic representations of Islam and Europe, in the contemporary world neither Islam nor Europe exist in any coherent, uniform, and monolithic

forms.<sup>425</sup> Alijani too believes that in many ways the framework of East-West may be outmoded and in need of serious reconsideration. According to him, whereas in the colonial context the East-West framework sought to highlight cultural, philosophical, and historical differences between Europe and non-Europe, in the post-colonial world the North-South framework provides a new and more useful lens through which to analyze economic, political, and military relations between developed and underdeveloped societies. Alijani notes that even though the North-South binary is itself a contested framework, its analytical lens and its focus on the economic relations of domination and exploitation may provide a wider space in which to expand on the transnational solidarities of Shariati's thought with the struggles of marginalized and oppressed groups around the world.<sup>426</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the context of mid-twentieth century Iranian society, Ali Shariati advanced his project of indigenous modernity within a civilizational framework in which the East-West binary featured prominently. On the basis of his belief that Islam was the primary (albeit not the only) component of Iranian identity, and that there existed major ontological differences between Islamic thought and Western thought, Shariati advocated a bottom-up and self-conscious transformation in Iranian society through a radical restructuring of traditional and particularly Shi'i-Islamic resources. As argued throughout this dissertation, in his attempt to present

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<sup>425</sup> Sara Shariati, interview.

<sup>426</sup> Alijani, interview.



an alternative to the Enlightenment ontology of Western/colonial modernity, Shariati sought to highlight both the social/mobilizational as well as the inspirational/ontological capacities of Islamic thought. While he saw a radical reformation of traditional religious doctrines as a prerequisite for sustained and broad-based social change, Shariati nevertheless believed that Islam's humanist, egalitarian and spiritual capacities could serve as an inspirational/ontological source on the basis of which to advance a progressive and emancipatory discourse of social and political change in Iranian society, and an alternative to the Enlightenment vision of modernity.

Though Shariati used categories such as civilizational rise and civilizational decline to explain the emergence of Western modernity and the expansion of European colonialism in Asia and Africa, his analysis was nonetheless attentive to the centrality of colonial and imperial domination in shaping East-West relations. Shariati's close attention to the cultural, social, political, and economic aspects of colonialism and imperialism and his discourse of indigenous modernity, with its emphasis on civilizational diversity and the reclaiming of local cultural/civilizational resources in the non-West, find common ground with the discourses of many other post-colonial thinkers of the mid-twentieth century. As Ashis Nandy points out, in the context of anti-colonial struggles in that period, the revival and reaffirmation of cultural traditions came to be seen as the heart and soul of authentic anti-colonialism.<sup>427</sup> In his writings and lectures, Shariati himself made numerous references to what he saw as the post-

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<sup>427</sup> Ashis Nandy, "Cultural Frames for Social Transformation: A Credo," in *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity: A Twentieth Century Anthology*, ed. Fred Dallmayr, G.N. Devy (Delhi: Altamira Press, 1998), 251.

colonial calls for return to the self in the discourses of Gandhi, Nyerere, Césaire, Fanon, and others. For Shariati, the rise of these discourses in Africa and Asia revealed, on the one hand, the decline of Western hegemony and its corresponding colonial modernity, and on the other hand, the possibility of reviving a civilizational diversity that colonialism sought to eliminate.

Critics may point out that Shariati's sympathetic position toward the post-colonial reclaimings of local/pre-colonial sources of collective identity was not always attentive to the often oppressive social and political consequences of such projects. As the analyses of Said, Duara, Dabashi, and a number of other contemporary scholars have revealed, in various parts of the global South post-coloniality took the form of militant nativism and anti-Westernism. Moreover, in the context of post-revolutionary Iranian society, the discourses of indigeneity and return to the self were effectively hijacked by the country's Islamist rulers and turned into discourses of power and oppression. However, if Shariati himself was not alive to see the nativist turn of post-colonialism in Iran and other parts of the global South, in their radical critiques of Islamism and other identitarian discourses, Shariati's intellectual followers have distinguished the emancipatory post-colonial discourses of Shariati, Fanon, Césaire, Gandhi, and others, from the oppressive and nativist articulations of the discourse of post-coloniality.

For his contemporary intellectual followers in post-revolutionary Iran, Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity represents neither a total rejection of Western modernity nor a total embrace of the native self. Instead, the project is seen by neo-Shariatis as an attempt to negotiate a third way between the

authoritarian and Western-centric modernism of the Pahlavi regime, and the conservative and traditionalist identitarianism of the post-revolution Islamic regime. As neo-Shariatis and a wide range of other commentators have shown, by advocating synthesis and dialogue and by advancing an approach based on the recognition of diversity and hybridity, Shariati sought to transcend the prevailing oppositional binaries of tradition and modernity, Islam and modernity, Islam and the West, and East and West. In revisiting Shariati's unfinished project of indigenous modernity, neo-Shariatis have rejected the reading of his civilizational discourse as a discourse of Occidentalism. They point out that in his simultaneous critique of the monolithic and essentialist constructions of the categories of East and West, Shariati seeks to establish a new (dialogical) relationship between these two hegemonic categories and to transcend the dichotomous discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism. In their view, Shariati's discourse of indigenous modernity provided a general outline not only for negotiating a contextually grounded vision of modernity and development in the particular context of Iranian society, but also for moving toward a post-colonial discourse of cosmopolitanism and civilizational diversity.

The efforts of Shariati and his contemporary intellectual followers to advance a post-colonial discourse of cosmopolitanism find common ground with the discourses of a number of contemporary Western and non-Western scholars who call for cultural and civilizational dialogue as a way out of the destructive dichotomy between the extremes of universalism and particularism. In this regard, the contributions of Fred Dallmayr may be particularly relevant. While advancing

a radical critique of Orientalism and Occidentalism, Dallmayr's work nevertheless seeks to highlight the possibility of non-monolithic, non-hierarchical, and anti-essentialist modes of differentiation in dealing with diverse social, cultural, and traditional entities. Using Dallmayr's argument about the possibility of and the conditions for cross-cultural, intellectual, and theoretical interactions beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism, a case may be made that the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity represents not a Laclauian notion of "self-apartheid,"<sup>428</sup> but rather a contextually negotiated entry point into a broader global negotiation of resistance against and emancipation from all relations of domination and exploitation. In this view, Shariati's effort to identify cultural/civilizational capacities in the Iranian context for advancing a future-oriented project of radical social and political change on the basis of the universal values of freedom, equality, and spirituality represents a move from the particular to the universal and a discourse of civilization from below. Perhaps it is this feature of Shariati's thought which gives it a transnational and global quality, while simultaneously making it context-specific and locally grounded.

While Dallmayr's contributions may be particularly useful for identifying the progressive capacities of the civilizational framework in which Shariati and neo-Shariatis advance their project of indigenous modernity, attentiveness to the radical critique of the East-West binary and the category of civilization by Said and others may help to highlight some of the limitations of this framework. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, for Shariati and his intellectual followers

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<sup>428</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 1996), 32, quoted in Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Beyond Culturalism and Monism: The Iranian Path to Democracy," *Iran Analysis Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (Winter 2005), 3.

the project of indigenous modernity aims not only to advance a contextually grounded discourse of modernity in the context of Iran and other Muslim societies, but also to find an alternative (Islamic) ontological vantage point to that of Enlightenment thought on the basis of which to negotiate a more humane vision of modernity. However, as discussed earlier, in critiquing the hegemonic conceptualization of the categories of East and West, Said and others challenge the very claim of an inherent ontological difference between Western and Oriental/Islamic societies. Moreover, Dabashi's reminder about the historical "polyvocality" of Muslim discourses and visions and the "polylocality" of Muslim geographies questions whether it is at all possible to speak of the categories of Islam, Islamic civilization, or Islamic thought in any clear and coherent sense. This doubt, as mentioned earlier, is also shared by other scholars such as Mahdavi and Knight, as well as by some neo-Shariatis including Sara Shariati. One question that emerges from this recognition, and one which neo-Shariatis are yet to answer, is whether it is possible to continue to speak of a particular Islamic ontology as the potential basis for negotiating an alternative/indigenous vision of modernity. Or is it, perhaps, more appropriate to speak of diverse (even contesting) Islamic ontologies and worldviews, the same way that today we speak of Islams and modernities? Another, and somewhat related, question that arises here is whether the search for an alternative/indigenous ontology for developing contextually negotiated sociopolitical and socioeconomic visions of modernity in the context of Iran and other Muslim societies must be confined only to the religious/spiritual traditions of these societies?<sup>429</sup> Finally, one may ask, as

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<sup>429</sup> Arguably, neo-Shariatis have been more attentive to the non-Islamic sources of the Iranian

Dabashi does, whether Shariati's civilizational framework and the centrality of the categories of Islam and West in his thought distort or undermine the far more global potential of his revolutionary discourse. It was already mentioned that for neo-Shariatis, Shariati's critique of colonial modernity and his engagement with other post-colonial and anti-colonial discourses of emancipation from a particularly Eastern, Islamic, and Iranian vantage point represent an attempt to avoid the trap of false universalism and the ideology of sameness, and a move from the particular to the universal (or universalism from below).<sup>430</sup> Nevertheless, it may also be suggested that expanding on Shariati's transnational solidarities and cosmopolitan engagements necessitates entering into active and meaningful dialogue with a wide range of global emancipatory and progressive discourses that are currently contributing to the negotiation of a more pluralistic vision of the world beyond any constructed civilizational, cultural, religious, and national boundaries.

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identity than Shariati himself, and in their new readings of Shariati's discourse of return to the self they have sought to advance a critical engagement with pre-Islamic Iranian history as well as the modern sources of the contemporary Iranian identity. However, as the discussion in the present chapter illustrates, the very claim that religion/Islam constitutes the primary component of the collective social and cultural identity in the contemporary Iranian society remains a contested notion that cannot be simply assumed, and which demands careful observation and critical reflection.

<sup>430</sup> I have taken the phrase "the ideology of sameness" from Dallmayr (See: Dallmayr, "Introduction," 423) and the phrase "universalism from below" from Mojtaba Mahdavi (See: Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Universalism from Below: Muslims and Democracy in Context," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 2, no. 2 (December 2009), 267-291).

## CONCLUSION

### **A Post-Colonial Reclaiming of Islam and Modernity**

In this dissertation I set out to investigate how a new reading of Ali Shariati's social, political, and philosophical thought by neo-Shariatis may potentially contribute to the ongoing debates about the relationship between Islam and modernity in Iran and other contemporary Muslim societies. In surveying the academic literature on Shariati, Chapter One distinguished between two posthumous readings of his thought: one, as a radical Islamic ideology whose significance lays primarily in its role in the revolutionary mass mobilization of the late 1970s; and another, as a contextually grounded discourse of socio-cultural and socio-political change with implications far beyond the 1979 revolution. The chapter also distinguished between readings of Shariati's Islamic discourse as a counter-modern discourse of traditional authenticity, and as a radical and simultaneous critique of tradition and modernity.

To help to contextualize the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity, Chapter Two briefly examined the encounter with colonial modernity in Muslim societies and the responses to this encounter by some of the major figures in contemporary Islamic thought. The chapter highlighted an ongoing effort by Muslim thinkers since the late nineteenth century to develop indigenous discourses of modern social and political change in their particular local contexts.

It suggested that while in their re-reading of Shariati's thought neo-Shariatism emphasize this continuity, they nevertheless distinguish Shariati's discourse from other Islamic discourses of indigenous modernity by accentuating his egalitarian interpretation of Islamic doctrines and his simultaneous attention to Islam's social/mobilizational and inspirational/ontological capacities. Chapter Three further examined the theorization of a contextually grounded discourse of sociopolitical development by Shariati and neo-Shariatism on the basis of a critical engagement with the social and inspiration capacities of public religion. In particular, the chapter focused on the neo-Shariati readings of the Shariati's triumvirate of "spirituality-equality-freedom" and their views on the role of intellectuals as agents of cultural/intellectual change within the civil society.

Chapter Four turned its attention to the philosophical foundations of the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity and its religious ontology. It argued that while Shariati's religious/spiritual ontology challenges the Enlightenment (Cartesian) account of modern subjectivity, his religiously mediated account of subjectivity is read by his contemporary followers as an effort to advance a contextually grounded discourse of human dignity and autonomy and individual rights and freedoms in the particular context of Iranian society. Finally, Chapter Five asked if the effort to negotiate an alternative to Enlightenment's rationalist ontology on the basis of the ontological capacities of Islamic thought constitutes an anti-Western turn and a discourse of Orientalism in reverse. In assessing the civilizational framework of the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity the chapter rejected the reading of Shariati's



thought as a nativist denunciation of the West and an identitarian embrace of an authentic Eastern/Islamic past. It was also argued that the Shariati/neo-Shariati project of indigenous modernity seeks not only to negotiate a contextually grounded discourse of social and political change in the particular context of Iranian society, but also to contribute to an emerging postcolonial discourse of cosmopolitanism.

What I tried to show in these five chapters was that in revisiting Shariati's intellectual project in post-revolutionary Iran, neo-Shariatis have contributed to the critical deconstruction of the hegemonic Islam-modernity, tradition-modernity, and Islam-West binaries that have shaped the debates about the patterns of social and political change in Muslim societies since the late nineteenth century. I also tried to show that in this revisiting neo-Shariatis have advanced an account of Shariati's thought as the general outline for an anti-colonial vision of an indigenous/alternative modernity or a post-colonial reclaiming of modernity in the Iranian context. As the final chapter pointed out, in its simultaneous critique of hegemonic universalism and essentialist particularism the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity enters into a cross-cultural dialogue with other global emancipatory discourses that advocate a more pluralistic vision of the world. It may also be argued that the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse contributes to an ongoing paradigm shift in the historiography and genealogy of modernity in the global South which has unsettled the universalist claims of Western/colonial modernity and its enlightenment project.

As argued in this dissertation, the view of the incompatibility of Islam and modernity that continues to resurface in contemporary debates is predicated, to a large extent, on a particular Eurocentric narrative of modernity that has been dominant in much of the post-Enlightenment European/Western sociopolitical and philosophical thought. In this view, modernity is an exclusively Occidental phenomenon and the modern West represents the height of human civilizational, cultural, artistic, philosophical, social, political, scientific, and economic achievements. It was this Eurocentric narrative of modernity that informed Hegel's conception of the modern West as the maturation of human reason and the exclusive site of human self-consciousness.<sup>1</sup> A similar view was also held by Weber, for whom, even though non-Western civilizations (particularly those in India, China, Babylonia, and Egypt) had historically contributed to the production of knowledge, it was only Western thought and science that could be considered as truly universal. In particular, Weber believed that what set modern Europe apart from all other civilizations was the former's rational organization of sociopolitical and socioeconomic relations, which was itself rooted in the "specific and peculiar rationalism of Western culture."<sup>2</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, this Eurocentric/Western-centric narrative of modernity was reproduced in various disciplines of humanities and social sciences, and it continues to be reproduced today by a range of prominent scholars and commentators. For American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, the modern West and its liberal-

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<sup>1</sup> Enrique Dussel, "World-System and 'Trans'-Modernity," in *Nepantla: Views from South* 3, no. 2 (2002), 222.

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Relationship between Religion and the Economic and Social life in Modern Culture*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 26.

democratic norms and institutions represent nothing short of the final and universal model of human civilization.<sup>3</sup> And for eminent German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, modernity remains an essentially European development and inseparable from "Occidental rationalism."<sup>4</sup>

While Eurocentric conceptions of modernity continue to resurface in some of the contemporary scholarly and mainstream debates, there has also existed a sustained attempt by various Western and non-Western commentators to move away from this hegemonic framework and to identify alternative visions of modernity. As a result of this persistent effort, we have in recent years and decades witnessed, in Immanuel Wallerstein's words, an ongoing "paradigmatic shift ... in the basic historiography of modernity."<sup>5</sup> In their contributions, prominent scholars like Wallerstein himself, Enrique Dussel, and others have drawn attention to the colonial underside or the dark side of modernity. For Dussel, the discourse of modernity is intimately connected to the European colonial project that began in the fifteenth century and that in the course of its expansion dominated and subsumed all other world cultures and civilizations.<sup>6</sup> Without taking into account this colonial history, he argues, the Eurocentric historiography of modernity sees the modern West as the product of internal processes of change within Europe that originate in ancient Greece and Rome and continue in the various stages of Europe's history. According to Dussel, this

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest* no. 16, Summer 1989, 4

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, *Reason and Rationalization of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science," *New Left Review* 226, (1997), 96.

<sup>6</sup> Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), 131.

Eurocentric framework reduces all of world history into the course of the "becoming" of Europe, as if "Europe had been chosen by Destiny as the final meaning of universal history."<sup>7</sup>

Other scholars, such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam, have challenged the Eurocentric construction of the discourse of modernity by advancing an account of modernity as a universal condition with diverse histories and a multiplicity of normative and structural constellations.<sup>8</sup> By drawing attention to pre-colonial experiences of the modern patterns of sociopolitical and socioeconomic change in various parts of Eurasia and other civilizational zones Subrahmanyam's conception of modernity as a "global shift" and other alternative conceptions such as the newly emerged framework of multiple modernities seek to de-link modernity from its colonial trajectory. Others yet, have challenged the Eurocentric discourses of modernity by problematizing the claim that European colonialism was responsible for introducing modernity to non-Westerners. Hamid Dabashi, for instance, has done this by distinguishing between "colonial" and "anti-colonial" conceptions of modernity. According to Dabashi, in the non-Western world modernity, defined in such terms as individual and collective sociopolitical agency, civil society, and notions of historical progress, has not been achieved through the violent and destructive force of colonialism or by

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<sup>7</sup> Dussel, "World-System and 'Trans'-Modernity," 222.

<sup>8</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997), 737.

"aping or mimicking Europe," but in the course of the resistance against Europe's colonial modernity.<sup>9</sup>

As the discussions in the preceding chapters revealed, although Shariati's thought contains a radical critique of the colonial history and the Enlightenment philosophy of European modernity, it nevertheless aims to identify the emancipatory aspects of the Western experiences of Enlightenment and modernity in a global context shaped by the hegemonic expansion of the Western colonial/imperial order. In examining Shariati's thought and the new readings of his thought, this dissertation showed that while the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse is attentive to the devastating consequences of colonialism for the people of the global South, it nevertheless seeks to delink modernity from the colonial trajectory of modern Europe by drawing attention to the non-European experiences of modernity in the context of the Islamic civilization and beyond, as well as to the cross-cultural make-up of the accumulated knowledges and processes of change that have come to be associated with the monolithic category of Western modernity. Similarly, it was argued that even though Shariati and neo-Shariatis acknowledge that in the course of its expansion European colonial modernity sought to quash, obliterate, or push to the periphery diverse human cultures and civilizations, they nevertheless hold that in negotiating a post-colonial or anti-colonial vision of modernity it is possible (and in fact necessary) to critically engage with and extract from local cultural and civilizational

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<sup>9</sup> Hamid Dabashi, "An Interview with Hamid Dabashi," ZNet, 22 September 2009, <http://www.zcommunications.org/an-interview-with-hamid-dabashi-by-hamid-dabashi> (accessed 21 February 2013). Also see: Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: New Press, 2007), 217-18.

resources. The refinement and restructuring of local traditions, in this view, is the basis not only for a sustained project of modernity and development from within, but also for a post-colonial project of moving toward the recognition of civilizational and cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism.

If, as Wallerstein argues, we have in fact entered into a new phase in the historiography of modernity, then Ali Shariati must certainly be given recognition as one of the pioneers of this paradigmatic shift in the Muslim world. As discussed in this dissertation, however, Shariati's post-colonial reclaiming of Islam and modernity is itself part of a historical and ongoing effort by Muslim modernists and reformists to advance contextually grounded discourses of modern sociocultural and sociopolitical change. In this effort, Muslim modernists and reformists from Afghani, Abduh, and Iqbal to Arkoun, Abu Zayd, Gülen, and Soroush have rejected the mutually exclusive binary of Islam and modernity and called for mutual recognition and synthesis. In developing their discourses of indigenous modernity, these modernists and reformists have also launched an effort to simultaneously reclaim modernity from the monopoly of Europe and non-European agents of Western-centric modernization, and Islam from the monopoly of traditional Muslim Ulama and advocates of nativism and culturalism.

### **Indigenous Modernity and the Post-Islamist Turn**

Over the course of the last four years, throughout the Middle East and North Africa region we have witnessed the emergence of a host of popular uprisings

with predominantly democratic demands. These have included the Green Movement in Iran, a wave of uprising across the Arab world that have come to be known in the West as the Arab Spring, and most recently a popular protest movement in Turkey dubbed the Turkish Spring. The rise of these movements has been regarded by some as the beginning of the latest or the fourth wave of democratization in the modern world.<sup>10</sup> Drawing parallels between the Arab uprisings of the second decade of the twenty-first century and the Latin American social movements of the century's first decade, prominent political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have described the developments in the Middle East and North Africa as the opening of a new chapter in democratic experiences with potential implications far beyond the region.<sup>11</sup> For other commentators, the recent developments are indicative of a much broader change in the prevailing social and cultural attitudes of the people of the region and a deep and ongoing ontological and epistemological shift that will continue to shape social and political life in Muslim societies in the years to come. Thus, one observer describes the emergence of the Green Movement and the Arab Spring as nothing short of a "discursive paradigm shift" and as "the most important historical

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<sup>10</sup> See: Stephen R Grand, "Starting in Egypt: The Fourth Wave of Democratization?," Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 10 February 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/02/10-egypt-democracy-grand> (accessed 7 January 2013); Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri "Arabs are Democracy's new Pioneers," *The Guardian* - Comment is Free, February 24, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/24/arabs-democracy-latin-america> (accessed 11 April 2013).

[development] in the region in the post-colonial era."<sup>12</sup> But what do these developments tell us about the relationship between religion and modernity in contemporary Muslim societies? And more importantly, for the purpose of the present dissertation, how might the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity help us in making sense of the ongoing changes, and what insights or normative possibilities does it offer for advancing the demands that have been put forth by these movements? These are not easy and straightforward questions and to fully answer them would not be possible without a detailed analysis of the ongoing events. What I wish to do here is to simply offer some preliminary observations along the lines of the arguments made in this dissertation.

For some scholars who are interested in the relationship between religion and the sociopolitical processes of change in Muslim societies, the recent developments reveal the inadequacy of normative frameworks that assume an inherent tension and clash between Islam and modernity. They point out that the emergence of popular uprisings with democratic demands debunks the thesis of Islamic/Muslim exceptionalism which holds that Muslim cultures and societies are exceptionally resistant to modernity and the modern ideas of secularism, democracy, and human rights and freedoms. The recent developments, it is argued, also reject the view that democratic changes in Muslim societies are unlikely to occur organically and without Western support or intervention. Moreover, the rise of the Green Movement and the Arab Spring is interpreted as

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<sup>12</sup> Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Middle East has Truly Reached Turning Point," *Edmonton Journal*, 12 March 2011, <http://www2.canada.com/edmontonjournal/news/ideas/story.html?id=824ac4a2-5a7e-4974-a8d4-a5bc049e145f> (accessed 28 March 2013).



an indication of the decline or even the end of Islamism as a sociopolitical condition as well as a mode of social and political action.<sup>13</sup> What we are witnessing, it is suggested, is a shift away from Islamism as the dominant condition and mode of action in various Muslim societies throughout the 1970s and 1980s and toward an era of "post-Islamism."<sup>14</sup> What is meant by post-Islamism, of course, is not the end of the public role of religion in the social and political life of Muslim societies. On the contrary, post-Islamism refers to a condition in which religion maintains an active presence and role within the public sphere.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, post-Islamism implies moving away from Islamism's binary construction of Islam and modernity and its idea of finding Islamic alternatives to all things modern. Thus, for Asef Bayat, who is often credited with coining the phrase, post-Islamism constitutes not a shift from Islamic faith toward ontological and epistemological secularism, but instead, "a complex process of breaking from an Islamist ideological package by adhering to a different, more inclusive, kind of religious project in which Islam nevertheless continues to remain important both as faith and as a player in the public sphere."<sup>16</sup> In the new post-Islamist framework, Bayat argues, Muslims can confidently

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<sup>13</sup> See: Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Asef Bayat, "The Post-Islamist Revolutions: What the Revolts in the Arab World Mean?" *Foreign Affairs* – Snapshots, 26 April 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67812/asef-bayat/the-post-islamist-revolutions> (accessed 9 April 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Asef Bayat, "Post-Islamism at Large," in *Post-Islamism: The Many Faces of Political Islam*, ed. Asef Bayat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25-26.

remain Muslim while also demanding citizenship rights within a "democratic state" and a "pious society."<sup>17</sup>

In the context of the ongoing shift to post-Islamism, the brand of Islamic/indigenous modernity that Shariati and neo-Shariatis advocate appears to be particularly well-positioned for addressing some of the pressing issues which contemporary Muslim societies are faced with today. One of these issues is the relationship between religion and state structures and the precise nature of the public role of religion. As Bayat and others have noted, the emergence of post-Islamist visions does not automatically mean a harmonious and tension-free relationship between religion and politics. On the one hand, it is a fact that the demands of the Green Movement and the Arab uprisings were predominantly secular and democratic. One of the major demands of these movements, which found clear articulations in the main slogans of the Green Movement (i.e. *ray-e man kojast?*, or, where is my vote?) and of the Arab Spring (i.e. *al sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam*, or, the people want the system to fall) has been the recognition of the democratic principle of popular sovereignty. And unlike the Islamist movements of the 1970s and 1980s, these newly emerged movements are not calling for the establishment of an Islamic state.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, however, religion remains a vital political force in post-Green Movement Iran and in post-Arab Spring Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere. Islamic parties were the major winners of post-revolution elections in Tunisia and Egypt, and in both countries

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<sup>17</sup> Bayat, "The Post-Islamist Revolutions."

<sup>18</sup> It was quite telling when after the 2010-2011 Tunisian uprising which ousted the country's long-time dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Rachid al-Ghannouchi, the leader of Tunisia's main Islamist party, Islamic Nahda, explicitly rejected the Iranian style model of the Islamic state and declined to run for president.

the question of the Sharia law and its compatibility or incompatibility with secular law remains a contentious issue.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as Bayat notes, the recent rise of the conservative Salafi movements suggests that "the possibility of a renewed fundamentalism" remains a realistic issue in various Muslim societies.<sup>20</sup>

Given the historical experiences of many Muslim societies with colonial modernity and authoritarian secularism, it is quite likely that even with a post-Islamist turn many Muslims will continue to articulate their religious and political discourses in opposition to a host of modern concepts including secularism and democracy. Like the discourses of other leading contemporary Muslim reformists such as Arkoun, Abu Zayd, Gülen, Soroush, and others, the neo-Shariati discourse has sought to advance contextually grounded and religiously mediated conceptions of popular sovereignty, secularism, democracy, and equal citizenship, and in doing so it has contributed to the ongoing shift from Islamism to post-Islamism in the particular context of post-revolutionary Iran. To the extent that in contemporary Muslim societies religion remains one of the primary sources of individual and collective identity and a major sociocultural factor in ongoing

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<sup>19</sup> The recent toppling of Muhammad Morsi's government in Egypt in the aftermath of a mass popular uprising and the ongoing clashes between the opponents and the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood since the 3 July 2013 military takeover reveals both the prospects and the challenges of the transition to democracy in the post-Islamist context. On the one hand, the participation of an unprecedented number of Egyptians in the anti-Morsi demonstrations across the country was indicative of the disillusionment of many religious and secular Egyptians with Islamist discourses and politics. On the other hand, however, the events serve as a reminder that despite this crisis Islamist parties and organizations remain important forces in the social and political life of Egypt and other Muslim societies. It remains to be seen what role the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic parties (from the more moderate Al-Wasat Party to the more conservative Al-Nour Party) may potentially play in future social and political changes in Egypt. However, to the extent that the historical experiences of Egypt and other Muslim countries in the region may be any indication, the suppression of Islamic parties and the imposition of restrictions on their activities in the public sphere often leads to their further radicalization and creates additional challenges in the path toward progressive social and political change.

<sup>20</sup> Bayat, "The Post-Islamist Revolutions."

social and political processes of change, the continuation of the Islamic-reform projects of indigenous modernity by neo-Shariatis and other Muslim reformers appears to be an indispensable component of any progressive vision of sociopolitical development.

In some ways, however, the neo-Shariati discourse may be argued to have an advantage over other, competing, Islamic/indigenous conceptions of sociopolitical development. Following Shariati's path, in developing their contextually grounded discourses of secularism and democracy neo-Shariatis advance a critical position toward both Islamism and traditionalism, as well as toward the hegemonic discourse of liberal democracy, which in many Muslim societies is equated with the project of imperialism and Western hegemony. Another advantage of neo-Shariatis, particularly over liberal Muslim reformers like Soroush, is their attentiveness to public religion and their critical position toward the discourse of individual faith and private piety. As chapters two and three discussed, for Shariati and neo-Shariatis the religious matter is essentially inseparable from the social matter. Thus, while Soroush and a number of other Muslim reformers regard the privatization of faith as a prerequisite for transition to secularism and democracy, neo-Shariatis call for engaging with the various manifestations of public religion, distinguishing between public religion's oppressive and emancipatory functions, and drawing on the latter functions for advancing emancipatory discourses of social and political change. Neo-Shariatis also point out that the privatization of religion undermines the attempt to reform and reinterpret traditional religious doctrines and dogmas that are manifested

publicly in everyday life and argue that private religiosity ultimately feeds religious dogmatism and fundamentalism. Furthermore, the Shariati/neo-Shariati project of indigenous modernity is advanced not only through developing modern and democratic interpretations of religious thought, but also through sustained engagement in civil society and popular mobilization and action. This social orientation differentiates the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse from the discourses of many contemporary reformists whose primary modes of engagement are religious hermeneutics and theological and jurisprudential reform.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the ongoing debates about the relationship between religion and the processes of democratization and secularization, a number of other major issues have emerged in the context of the recent developments in contemporary Muslim societies. Let me end this section by commenting briefly on two of those issues and examining some of the ways in which the neo-Shariati approach toward them may differ from the approaches of other advocates of Islamic/indigenous modernity. The first is the question of social welfare and socioeconomic development. As a number of commentators have pointed out, the prevailing socioeconomic conditions of contemporary Muslim societies have been a major factor in the rise of the recent uprisings. Despite the participation of various social sectors in these movements, many of the protesters are said to belong to a new class of young, educated, urban poor, faced with the prospects of unemployment and economic and political disenfranchisement.<sup>22</sup> In analyzing the

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<sup>21</sup> See: Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006), 339.

<sup>22</sup> Bayat, "The Post-Islamist Revolutions."

Arab uprisings, commentators have pointed to the consequences of neo-liberal policies that were implemented in various Arab states during the 1980s and 1990s. As in much of the rest of the global South, neoliberalism in these countries resulted in the deterioration of the public sector and social services, as well as in major changes in the labor market including the skyrocketing of unemployment rates among the youth.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the incorporation of the national economies of these countries into the global financial system increased their vulnerability vis-à-vis the failures of larger and more powerful economies. As one observer notes, it is no accident that the Arab Spring initially began in the context of the North American and European economic crisis. According to Valentine Moghadam, the impact of the 2008 financial meltdown was felt immediately in many Arab states, causing a sharp increase in the prices of food and other basic commodities and resulting in street protests and workers strikes.<sup>24</sup> The question of economic justice and social welfare continues to be a major issue in post-revolution Arab states and is likely to remain a pressing matter in the near future.<sup>25</sup> In the Iranian case too concern with economic welfare is becoming an increasing pressing issue for various social sectors, particularly as the country faces crippling economic sanctions over its nuclear program. Moreover, it has been noted by commentators that the neo-liberal economic policies of Ahmadinejad's government over the last eight years have contributed to the

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<sup>23</sup> Valentine M Moghadam, "What is Democracy? Promises and Perils of the Arab Spring," *Current Sociology* published online (17 April 2013), 6, <http://csi.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/04/16/0011392113479739> (accessed 21 April 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> As the new ruling party, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has supported the continuation of much of Mubarak era neoliberal policies. In Morocco too, the leader of the Islamic Nahda party, Rachid al-Ghannouchi has expressed support for continuing the "free market" economic policies of the ousted regime. See: Moghadam, "What is Democracy?," 11.

economic disenfranchisement of a large sector of the Iranian population and particularly the country's youth.<sup>26</sup>

Arguably, in a context where the demand for social welfare and economic democratization is becoming an important site of social mobilization and popular action, one of the advantages of the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse over other Islamic discourses of indigenous modernity is the former's attentiveness to the issues of social and economic justice. While some of the leading advocates of Islamic reformism have been either inattentive to socioeconomic issues (i.e. Abu Zayd, Arkoun) or supportive of capitalism and free market economics (i.e. Soroush, Gülen), the radical critique of neo-liberalism and emphasis on economic egalitarianism by Shariati and neo-Shariatis can contribute to the negotiation of a new language of indigenous modernity that corresponds to the everyday challenges of an increasingly growing sector of economically vulnerable and disenfranchised. At the same time it must be noted that while the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse advocates a general egalitarian and socialistic economic orientation, it falls short of offering specific models of economic production and distribution that correspond to Iran's particular socioeconomic condition and the country's place in the existing structures of a globalized capitalist economy.

Of the leading neo-Shariatis whose ideas I have discussed in this dissertation, Reza Alijani has shown greater interest in the question of economic

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<sup>26</sup> See: Yassamine Mather, "Iran's Political and Economic Crises," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 38, no. 3 (2010): 503-518; Conn Hallinan, "How Iran's Workers Fight Ahmadinejad's Neoliberal Cutbacks: The Iranian Tsunami," *CounterPunch* (16 March, 2010), <http://www.counterpunch.org/2010/03/16/the-iranian-tsunami/> (accessed 12 May 2013); Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, "Iranian Youth in Times of Economic Crisis," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 6 (2011): 789-806.

development and has attempted to expand Shariati's triad of spirituality-equality-freedom in a socioeconomic direction. According to Alijani, while Shariati does not offer any specific economic models, he is generally supportive of a "pro-poor development agenda." Alijani thus argues that the overall orientation of Shariati's "unfinished" socioeconomic thought may find affinities with the "social-democratic" or "welfare-state" models of development.<sup>27</sup> In the current context of the global hegemony of neo-liberal economics, the decline of the social-democratic and welfare-state models of economic distribution in Europe and North America, and the weakening of the nation-state vis-à-vis powerful international financial institutions (i.e. International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, etc.) and multinational and transnational corporations, however, Alijani's suggestion seems at best insufficient for moving toward a bottom-up and egalitarian model of economic development in Iran.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, neo-Shariatis like Alijani may benefit from attending to the ongoing discussions in the global South about the prospects of economic development through increased South-South cooperation and through a fundamental re-thinking of the growth and industrialization models of neo-classical economics.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Reza Alijani, *Rend-e kham: Shariati-shenasi jeld-e yekom: zamaneh, zendegi, va arman-ha (The Pure Nonconformist: Shariatology Volume One: Era, Life, and Ideals)* (Tehran: Ghalam 1387), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Alijani and other leading neo-Shariatis including Ehsan Shariati insist that Shariati's radical and egalitarian vision of political and economic democracy should not be mistaken with the really-existing Scandinavian social-democratic models which operate within the broader context of global capitalist economy. However, as discussed earlier neo-Shariatis have not yet offered a specific vision of genuine socioeconomic development on the basis of Shariati's ideas.

<sup>29</sup> In her critical assessment of the discourse of globalization, Sara Shariati addresses some of the limitations of the growth and industrialization models of socioeconomic development. See: Sara Shariati, "Chehreh jahani-gar, chehreh jahani-zadeh: siyasat jahani kardan va ravand tarikhi jahani



The other major issue that recent developments seem to have put on the front burner is the issue of women's rights and gender equality.<sup>30</sup> A rich body of literature is beginning to emerge that focuses on the participation of women in the popular uprisings and addresses a wide range of issues including women's socioeconomic conditions and rights, the status of women in Islamic law, and the social dynamics of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual exploitation. In recent years, there has also been much interest in the question of the status of women in Muslim societies within the Western academy and particularly in works dealing with the relationship between Islam and modernity. Within contemporary Islamic thought, however, the question of women's rights and status has remained a largely neglected issue. There has, of course, existed a sustained effort by a number of contemporary Muslim feminists including Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, Amina Wadud, Azam Taleqani, and others to develop contextually grounded discourses of gender equality on the basis of modern interpretations of Islamic law and religious doctrines. Nevertheless, these efforts have not yet brought a shift in the mainstream of modern Islamic thought, including its reformist current, toward greater attentiveness to gender issues.

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shodan" ("The Globalizer Face and the Globalized Face: An Evaluation of Globalizing Policies and the Process of Globalization"), in *Khodkavi-e melli dar asr-e jahani shodan (National Self-Examination in the Age of Globalization)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati, (Tehran: Ghasidehsara, 1381/2002): 127-174. Susan Shariati too notes that in the context of non-Western societies industrialization and urbanization-centered developed policies often result in uneven socioeconomic development, rise of urban slums, concentration of poverty and wealth within certain social sectors, the deterioration of traditional social networks that enable a sense of solidarity and interdependence, the crisis of political legitimacy, and the rise of populism. See: Susan Shariati, "Populism: khizeshi baray-e tashakhoos" ("Populism: A Movement for Recognition"), in Susan Shariati, *Don kishot dar shahr (Don Quixote in the City)* (Tehran: Rasesh, 1388/2010): 103-108.

<sup>30</sup> See: Moghadam, "What is Democracy?," 5-6.

Among the prominent Muslim reformists of the twentieth century, Shariati appears to be one of the first to explicitly address the issue of gender equality. In his sociological analysis of Islamic thought in *Islamology*, as well as in other works, Shariati argues that Islam's principle of egalitarianism recognizes the equality of men and women. He also defends women's education and their active participation in social, political, and economic spheres. Even though, as neo-Shariatis themselves have acknowledged, Shariati's thought does not offer a systematic analysis about the status of women and gendered relations of domination and subordination, his thought and the new readings of his thought by neo-Shariatis seem to offer pertinent insights about the conditions for advancing contextually negotiated accounts of women's rights and gender equality. Here again the contributions of Reza Alijani and other leading neo-Shariati figures such as Susan Shariati and Hassan Yousefi-Eshkevari seem to be particularly relevant. While placing the question of the status of women at the center of their analysis, these contributions have nevertheless expanded on Shariati's broader revolutionary framework by addressing the challenges and prospects of strengthening the links between the project of women's emancipation and the project of social emancipation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For Reza Alijani's discussions on the topic see: Reza Alijani, "Din, zan, va donyay-e jadid: goftegoo ba Reza Alijani" ("Religion, Women, and the Modern World: A Conversation with Reza Alijani"), *Cheshmendaaz-e Iran* no. 44 (Tir-Mordad 1386/July-August 2007): 99-108; Reza Alijani, "Jonbesh zanan: jonbeshi mostaghel ama mortabet" ("Women's Movement: Independence and Interdependence"), *Baztab-e Andisheh* no. 70, Bahman 1384/February 2006, 57-59; Reza Alijani, "Chera zan dar matoon moghadas?" ("Why the Question of Woman in Sacred Texts?"), Shariati Discourse Forum (no date), [http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=683&pid=3036#post\\_3035](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=683&pid=3036#post_3035) (accessed 2 July 2011); Reza Alijani, "Motoon-e moghadas va doniaye jadid" ("Sacred Scriptures and the Modern World"), Shariati Discourse Forum (no date), [http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=683&pid=3036#post\\_3036](http://talar.shandel.info/showthread.php?tid=683&pid=3036#post_3036) (accessed 2 July 2011).

## Indigenization and the Quest for Universalism from Below

As Chapters Four and Five discussed, Shariati's critical position toward Western/Enlightenment modernity and his attempt to develop a contextually grounded discourse of revolutionary social and political change on the basis of a modern reinterpretation of Islamic thought has been read in two radically different ways. According to his critics, in the context of mid-twentieth century Iran Shariati's Islamic discourse was part of a broader anti-Western discourse of nativism and Orientalism in reverse which emphasized an inherent dichotomy between Islam and modernity and between the Orient and the Occident. Shariati's attempt to advance a localized conception of an anti-colonial modernity is interpreted by these critics as an anti-democratic and anti-secular embrace of traditional authenticity which ultimately paved the way for a radical Islamist turn in Iranian society and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Critics also draw links between Shariati's critique of Westernization and the post-revolution project of the top-down Islamization of Iranian society and of various academic disciplines. Thus, some commentators have suggested that Shariati's call to return to the authentic self and his emphasis on the reaffirmation and reappropriation of

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For Susan Shariati's discussions on the topic see: Susan Shariati, "Zanan dar projeh shariati" ("Women in Shariati's Project"), interview with Parvin Bakhtiarnajad, *Etemaad*, 15 Aban 1386/6 November 2007, <http://drshariati.org/show.asp?id=106> (accessed April 17 2011); Susan Shariati, "Chand kalameh harf-e zananeh: beh bahaneye rooz-e jahani-e zan" ("A Few Feminine Words: On the Occasion of the International Women's Day"), in Susan Shariati, *Don kishot dar shahr (Don Quixote in the City)* (Tehran: Rasesh, 1388/2010): 235-238. For Hassan Yousefi-Eshkevari's work on the topic see: Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Women's Rights and the Women's Movement," in Ziba Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, 163-173; Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Reformist Islam and Modern Society," in Ziba Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, 155-163.

the indigenous culture helped to justify in post-revolutionary Iran such oppressive policies as the imposition of the veil on Iranian women and the gendered segregation of public spaces.<sup>32</sup> Others yet have argued that Shariati's insistence on developing a modern account of Islamic ontology and epistemology was a major precursor to the post-revolutionary discourse of Islamization of social sciences.<sup>33</sup>

For neo-Shariatis as well as for a number of other contemporary Iranian commentators, however, Shariati's emphasis on the necessity of reappropriating and critically engaging with local cultural/religious resources was informed by his analysis about the conditions for advancing a bottom-up and sustainable project of social and political change in the particular context of Iranian society. These commentators reject the reading of Shariati's thought as an endorsement of or a precursor to the post-revolution calls for Islamization of knowledge and of cultural, social, political, and economic relations. They do, however, argue that Shariati's thought was an attempt toward indigenizing modern social science analysis in Iran in a creative and critical dialogue with the contributions of a wide range of Western and non-Western social scientists and theorists. Increasingly in recent years, a number of non-Iranian commentators too have begun developing a similar reading of Shariati's thought as an exercise in indigenous social theory and as part of a broader effort in the global South to break away from the hegemony of Eurocentric metanarratives of social and political change. It is precisely from

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<sup>32</sup> See: Nayereh Tohidi, "Modernity, Islamization, and Women in Iran," in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, ed. Valentine M Moghadam (London: Zed Books, 1994), 123. Also see: Rokhsana Bahramitash, "Revolution, Islamization, and Women's Employment in Iran," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* ix, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 2003), 232.

<sup>33</sup> See: Sohrab Behdad, "Islamization of Economics in Iranian Universities," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 2 (1995): 193-217, 198.

this lens that Raewyn Connell analyzes Shariati's thought in her 2007 book entitled *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*.<sup>34</sup> For Walter Mignolo too, who discusses Shariati in some of his recent works on coloniality and modernity, Shariati's significance is primarily in his contribution to the post-colonial struggles to delink from the colonial modes of knowledge and understanding and to give recognition to indigenous knowledges and epistemologies.<sup>35</sup>

The critical deconstruction of the colonially mitigated modes of knowledge and the search for alternative ontologies and epistemologies on the basis of which to negotiate alternative future possibilities places Shariati's thought in conversation with a wide range of progressive and emancipatory discourses in the global North and the global South. Nevertheless, if the experiences of postcolonialism in various parts of the global South and the experience of Islamism in post-revolutionary Iran are any indication, engagement with the discourse of indigeneity and the search for alternative/indigenous ontologies and epistemologies run the risk of falling in the trap of the West-rest binary and of producing or at least bolstering new forms of particularism and ethnocentrism. To avoid these potential dangers, the project of indigenization must be clearly discerned from the projects of nativism and Orientalism in reverse. This means that indigenization and decolonization must be defined not as a turn against universalism but rather as a move toward cosmopolitanism and universalism from

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<sup>34</sup> See: Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 125-134.

<sup>35</sup> See: Walter D. Mignolo, "Prophets Facing Sidewise: The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy* 19, no. 1 (2005), 117.

below. In this regard, by grouping together Shariati with Islamists such as Qutb and Khomeini as part of an overall Islamic project of "de-coloniality," commentators like Mignolo effectively undermine this major distinction and overlook the dynamic heterogeneity of Islamic responses to modernity and coloniality.<sup>36</sup>

By distinguishing between the discourses of indigenization and Islamization, on the other hand, a number of Muslim scholars have sought to draw attention to the kind of ontological/epistemological and methodological differences within Islamic thought that have produced two entirely different social and intellectual projects in contemporary Muslim societies. According to Syed Farid Alatas, for instance, while Islamization entails a nativist rejection of all Western knowledge, indigenization calls for moving away from the hegemonic universalism of Eurocentric modes of knowledge and moving toward an inclusive universalism from below by drawing attention to differential histories and contextual particularities.<sup>37</sup> Shariati's project, argues Alatas, is a contribution to the indigenization of social science analysis in Muslim societies and is entirely different from the project of Islamization of knowledge and the discourses of Qutb and other Islamist thinkers.<sup>38</sup> As I have argued in this dissertation, it is essentially along the lines of the discourse of universalism from below that neo-Shariatis have read Shariati's unfinished intellectual project in post-revolutionary

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<sup>36</sup> See: Walter Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007), 457.

<sup>37</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, "The Sacralization of the Social Sciences: A Critique of an Emerging Theme in Academic Discourse," *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, 91, no. 91 (1995), 91.

<sup>38</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, "Interview," in *Shariati dar daneshgah (Shariati at the University)*, ed. Bonyad Shariati (Tehran: Bonyad Farhangi-e Doctor Ali Shariati, 1390): 109-130, 112-119.

Iran. As suggested in Chapter Five, however, by going beyond the limiting contours of the civilizational framework of his Islamic discourse Shariati's contemporary intellectual followers can further distinguish his thought from nativist and identitarian Islamic discourses and cultivate what Dabashi aptly terms Shariati's "cosmopolitan and transnational solidarities."<sup>39</sup>

### **Shariati/neo-Shariati Discourse and the State of the Discipline**

Throughout this dissertation I have sought to show how the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity relates to the ongoing debates within the discipline of political science. Perhaps the most evident connection is with Middle East and North Africa area studies in the subfield of comparative politics. In recent years, many scholars in this area have focused their work on examining the challenges and prospects of sociopolitical development in Muslim societies in the region.<sup>40</sup> As Chapters Two and Three argued, the Shariati/neo-Shariatis discourse contributes to these debates by advancing a normative account of sustainable and bottom-up sociopolitical change toward the realization of democratic citizenship,

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<sup>39</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 115.

<sup>40</sup> See: Elisabeth Ozdalga and Sune Persson eds., *Civil Society, Democracy and The Muslim World* (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1997); John Esposito and Azzam Tamimi eds., *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (London: C. Hurst & Co. 2000); Aryn B. Sajoo ed., *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002); Ronald Inglehart, *Islam, Gender, Culture, and Democracy: Findings from the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey* (Willowdale, ON: De Sitter Publications, 2003); Larry Jay Diamond, Marc F Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003); Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam And Human Rights: Tradition And Politics* - Fourth Edition (Boulder: Westview, 2007); Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ahmet T. Kuru and Alfred C. Stepan eds., *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2012).

secularism, economic and social justice, human rights, and gender equality. As these chapters pointed out, however, the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse constitutes only one among several other emerging discourses of indigenous modernity in contemporary Muslim societies. While this dissertation explored some of the areas of convergence and divergence between these competing discourses, there remains a need to further compare and contrast the normative and institutional vision of sociopolitical development in neo-Shariati thought with those advanced by the proponents of Islamic liberalism including Gülen, Soroush, and others.

In various ways, the discussions in this dissertation also relate to the broader debates within the discipline about the relationship between religion and politics. During most of the previous century, political science, like many other disciplines of social sciences, was often inattentive to the interaction between the religious and the political in the modern world. The late-twentieth century phenomenon known as the return of religion, however, led to a surge of interest in the political analysis of religion's manifestations in the modern world and its role and place in contemporary public social and political life.<sup>41</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, the analysis of Shariati and neo-Shariatis about the relationship

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<sup>41</sup> Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ted G. Jelen and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, The Few, and The Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jeff Haynes ed., *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Arthur Bradley and Paul Fletcher eds., *The Politics to Come: Power, Modernity and the Messianic* (London and New York: Continuum International, 2010); Ronald Weed and John von Heyking, *Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010); Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).



between public religion and the modern processes of sociopolitical development helps us to better understand the particular context and dynamics of the modern rise of religion in Iran and other contemporary Muslim societies. Additionally, as the discussions in Chapter Four revealed, the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of public religion, which finds common ground with the discourses of a range of contemporary Western commentators including José Casanova, Jürgen Habermas, Cornel West, Judith Butler, Charles Taylor, Fred Dallmayr, and others contributes to the further recognition of the differential (progressive and oppressive) functions of religion in the public sphere. Here again, careful scrutiny is necessary to adequately distinguish between various manifestations of public religiosity and spirituality. As mentioned earlier, in the post-Green Movement and Arab Spring context in the Middle East and North Africa the question of the role of religion in public life has proven to be a major point of contention between various social and political forces and the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse seems to be particularly well-positioned to address this debate.

Finally, the Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse of indigenous modernity finds many direct and indirect connections with some of the ongoing debates in various subfields of political science about the relationship between politics and identity, specifically cultural identity. In addition to Dallmayr, whose work on this topic was discussed at some length in Chapter Five, an increasing number of contemporary political scientists are engaged in analyzing a wide range of topics including conflict, ideology, democracy, citizenship, globalization, and gender and sexuality through the analytical lens of the relationship between politics and

cultural identity.<sup>42</sup> The Shariati/neo-Shariati discourse potentially contributes to these debates not only by challenging Western-centric discourses of modern cultural identity and providing a view from the global South, but also by emphasizing the need to negotiate a third way between the extremes of culturalism and the total negation of cultural identity/difference. Nevertheless, as Chapter Five pointed out, the views of Shariati and neo-Shariatis about the relationship between cultural identity and religious identity in the particular context of the Iranian society, and between cultural identity and global solidarity in the context of the globalization of capitalist modernity, are themselves in need of further scrutiny and reassessment.

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<sup>42</sup> P W Preston, *Political/Cultural Identity: Citizens and Nations in a Global Era* (London: SAGE, 1997); Rik Pinxten, Ghislain Verstraete, and Chia Longman eds., *Culture and Politics: Identity and Conflict in a Multicultural World* (New York: Berghahn, 2004); Paul Gilbert, *Cultural Identity and Political Ethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Sarah Song, *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys : Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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